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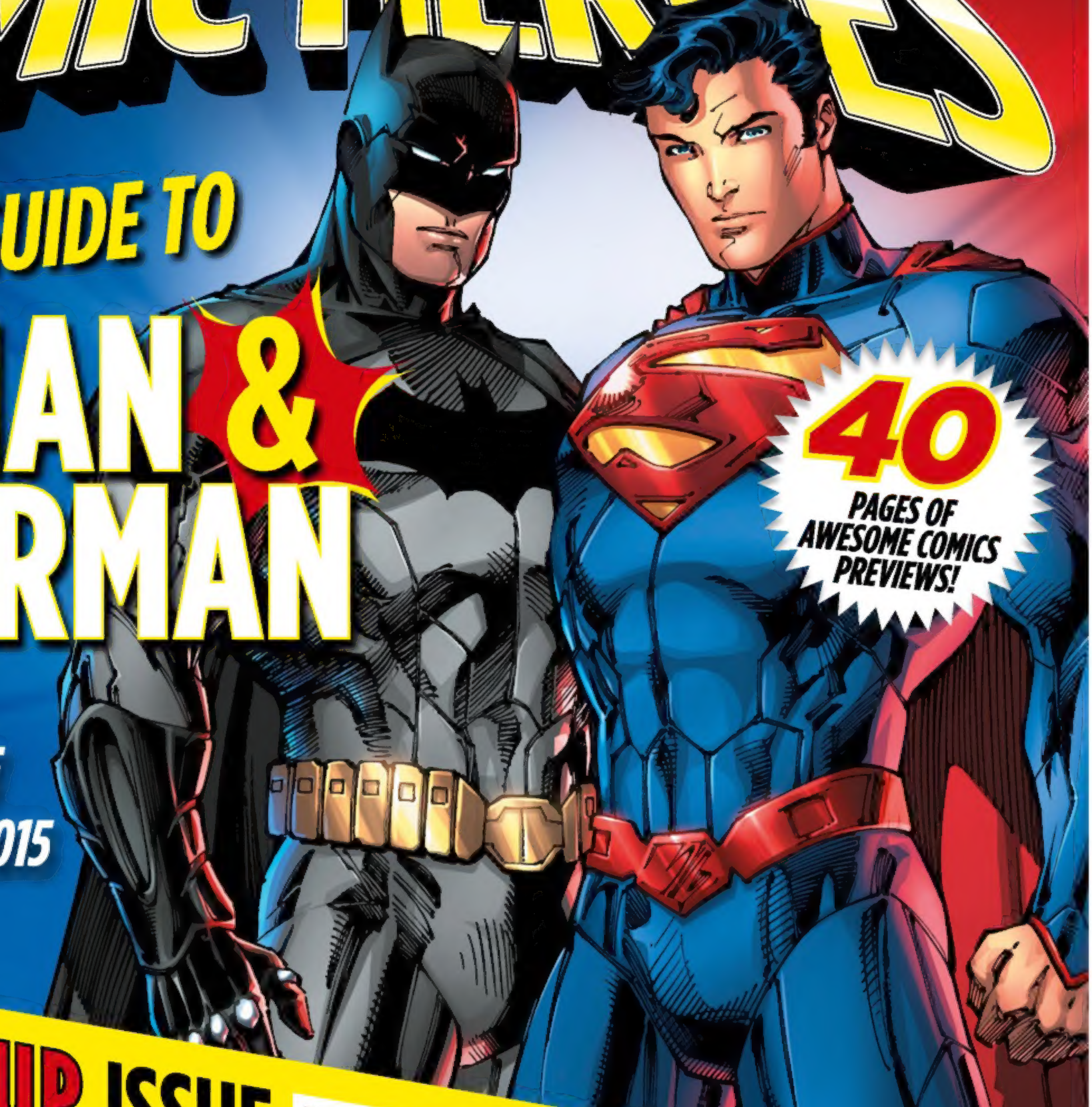

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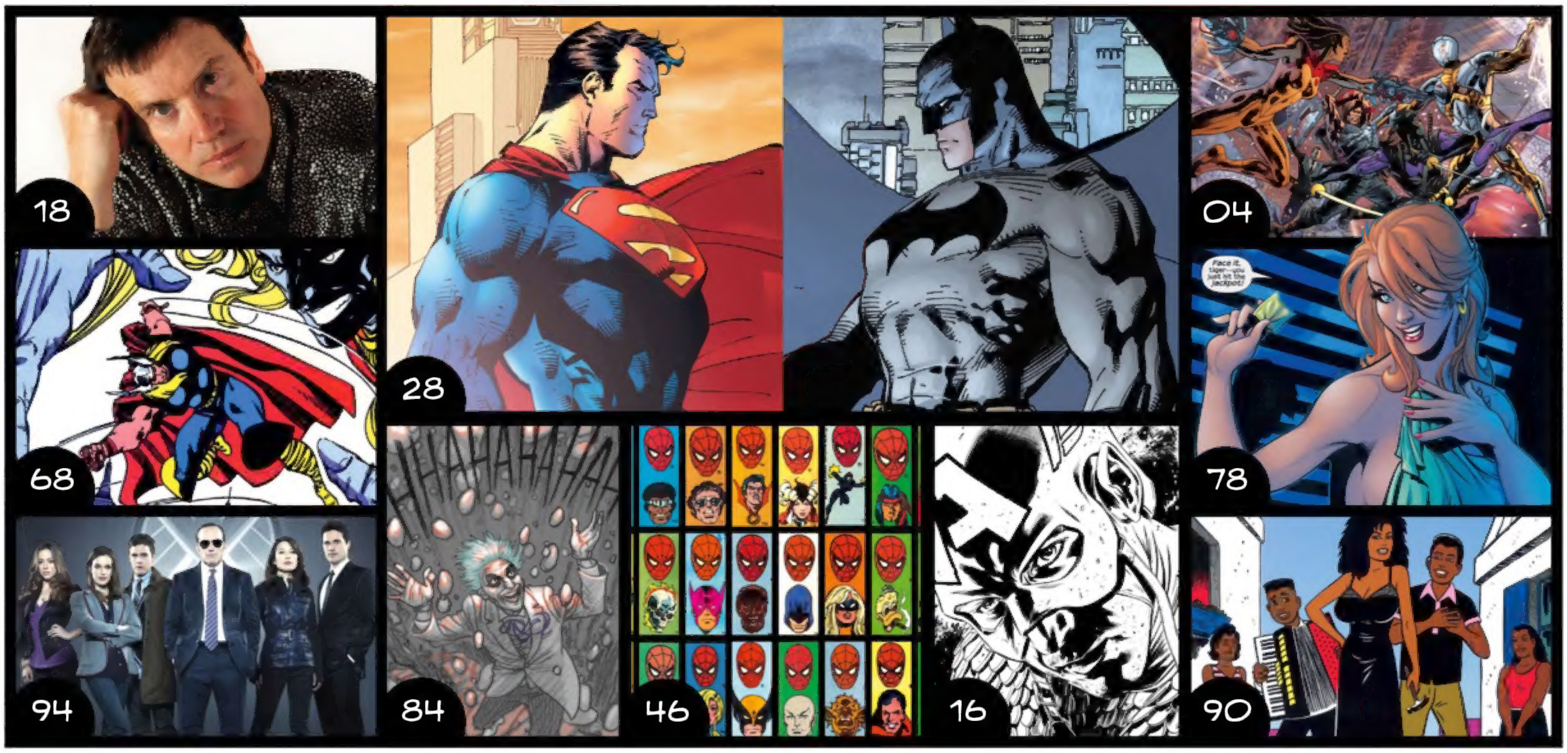
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SIDEKICK
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AND THE PEOPLE OF THE BLACK CIRCLE
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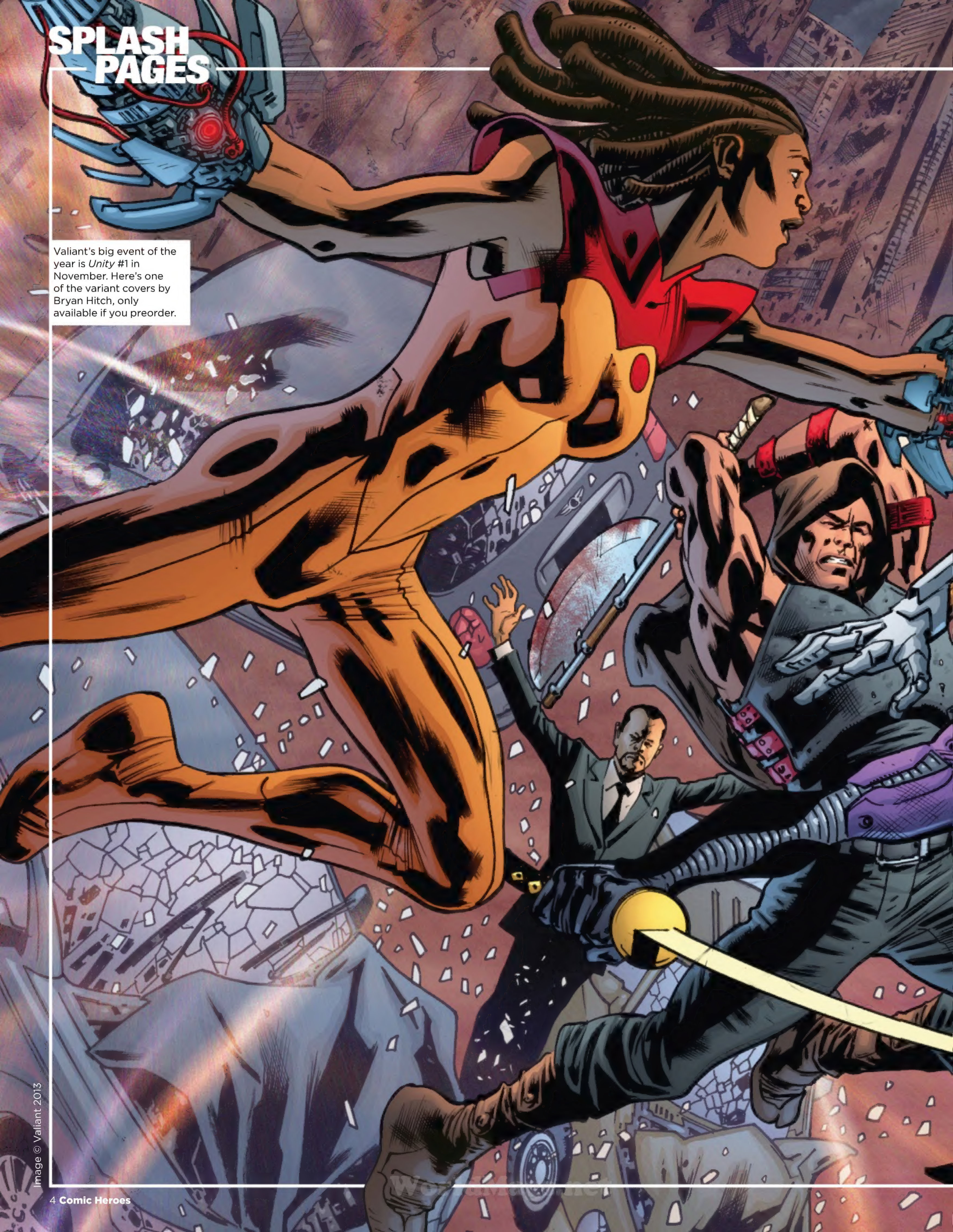

Valiant's big event of the year is *Unity* #1 in November. Here's one of the variant covers by Bryan Hitch, only available if you preorder.

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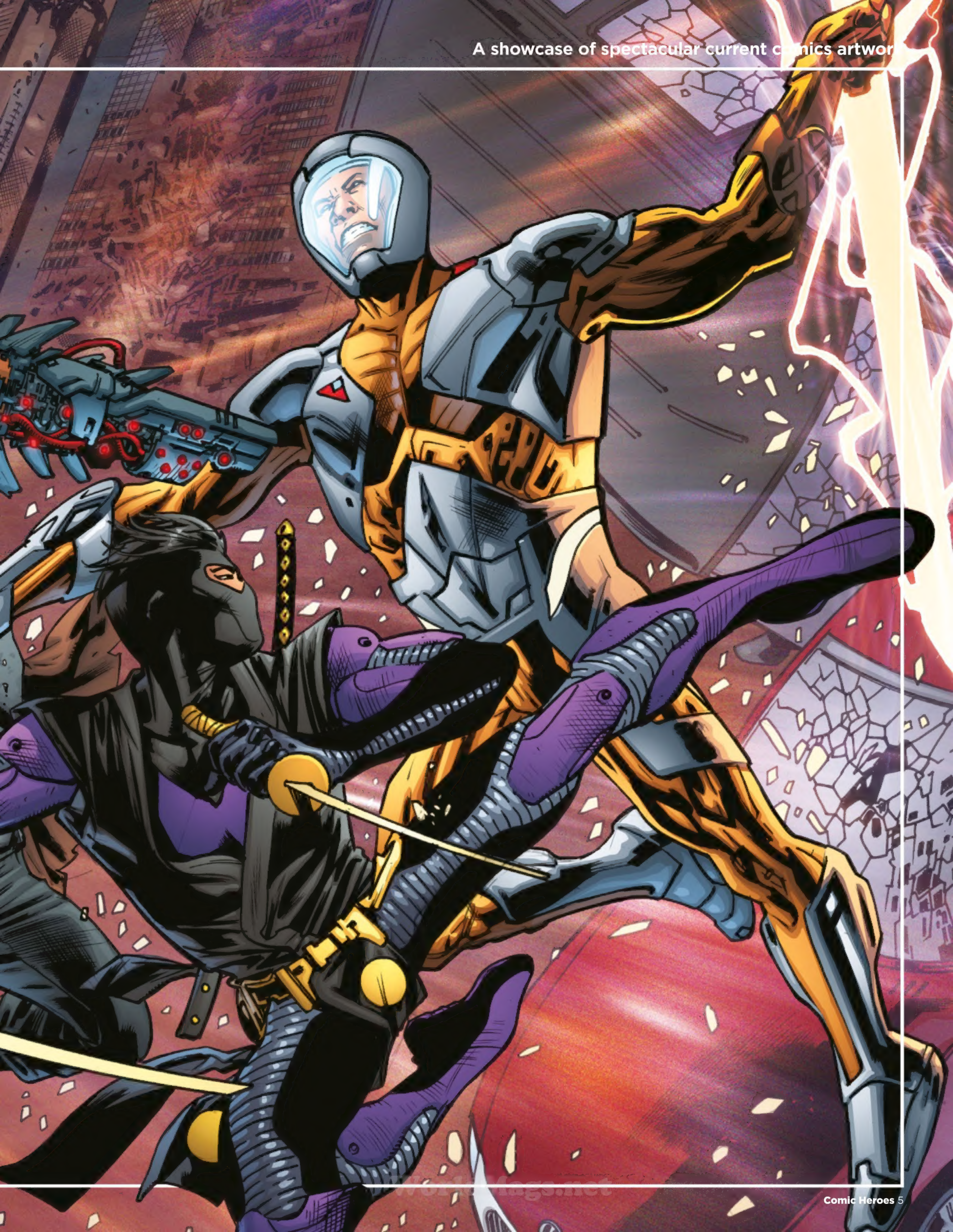

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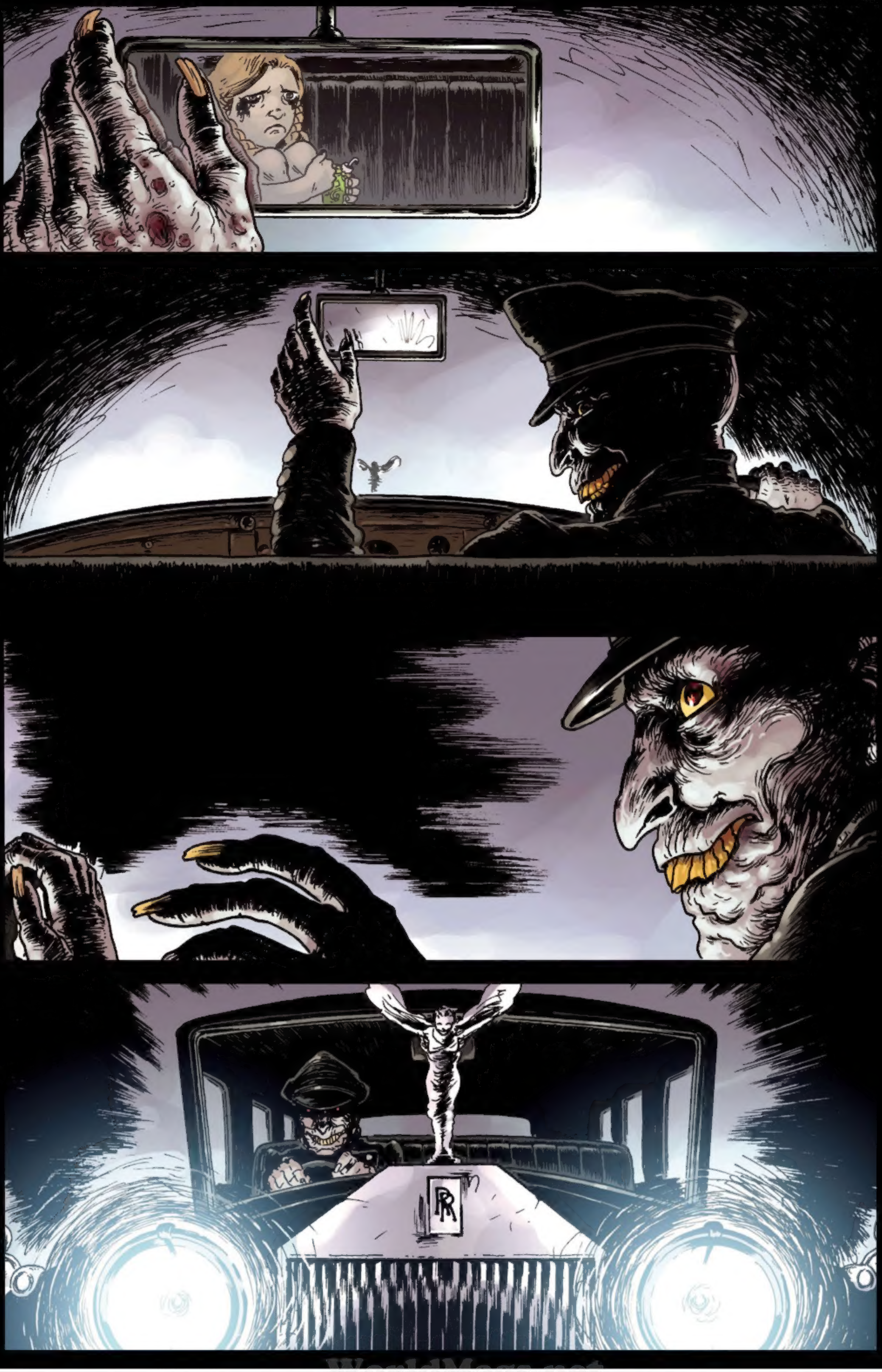

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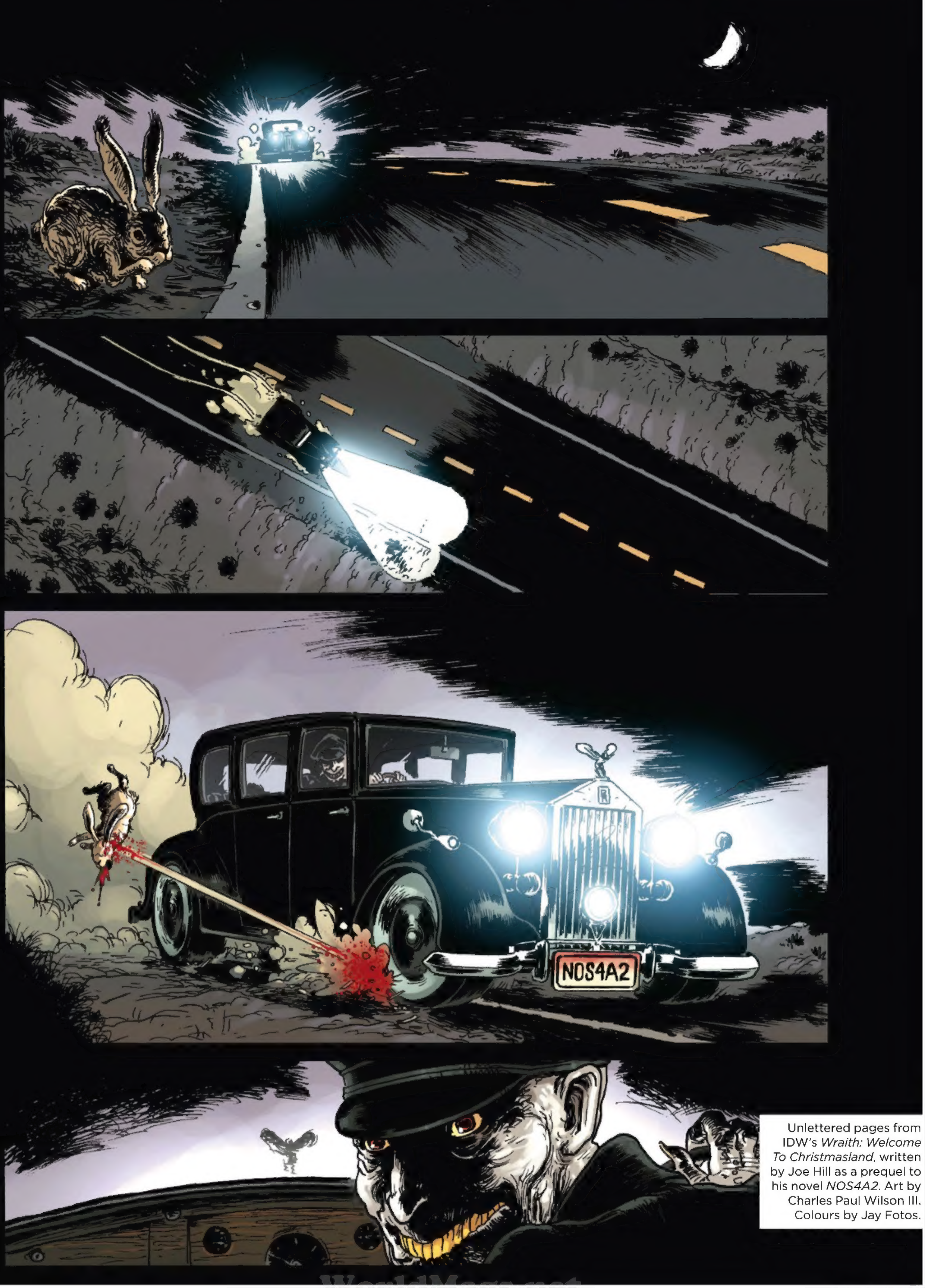

Unlettered pages from IDW's *Wraith: Welcome To Christmasland*, written by Joe Hill as a prequel to his novel *NOS4A2*. Art by Charles Paul Wilson III. Colours by Jay Fotos.

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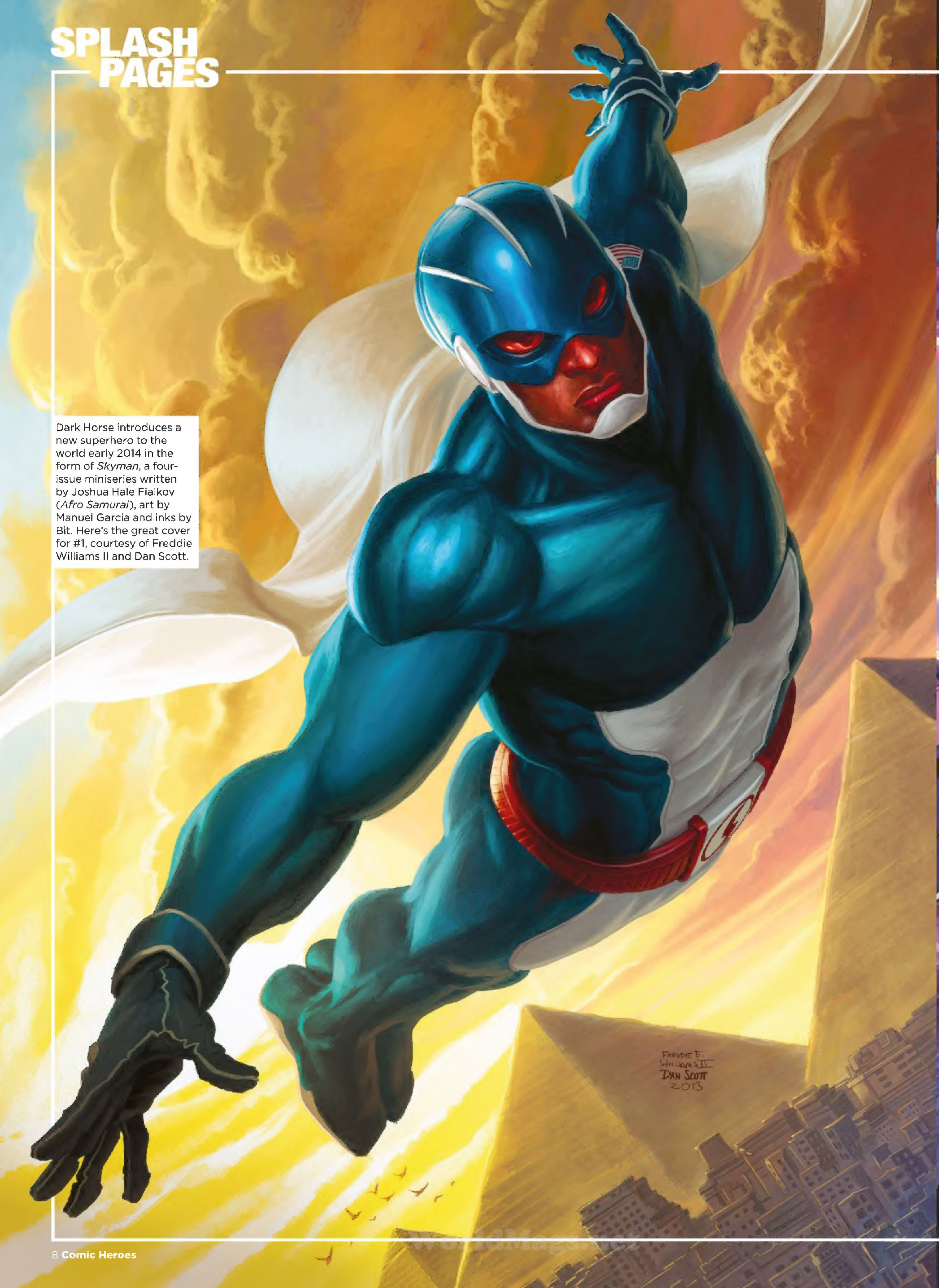
Freddie E. Williams II
Dan Scott
2013

Dark Horse introduces a new superhero to the world early 2014 in the form of *Skyman*, a four-issue miniseries written by Joshua Hale Fialkov (*Afro Samurai*), art by Manuel Garcia and inks by Bit. Here's the great cover for #1, courtesy of Freddie Williams II and Dan Scott.

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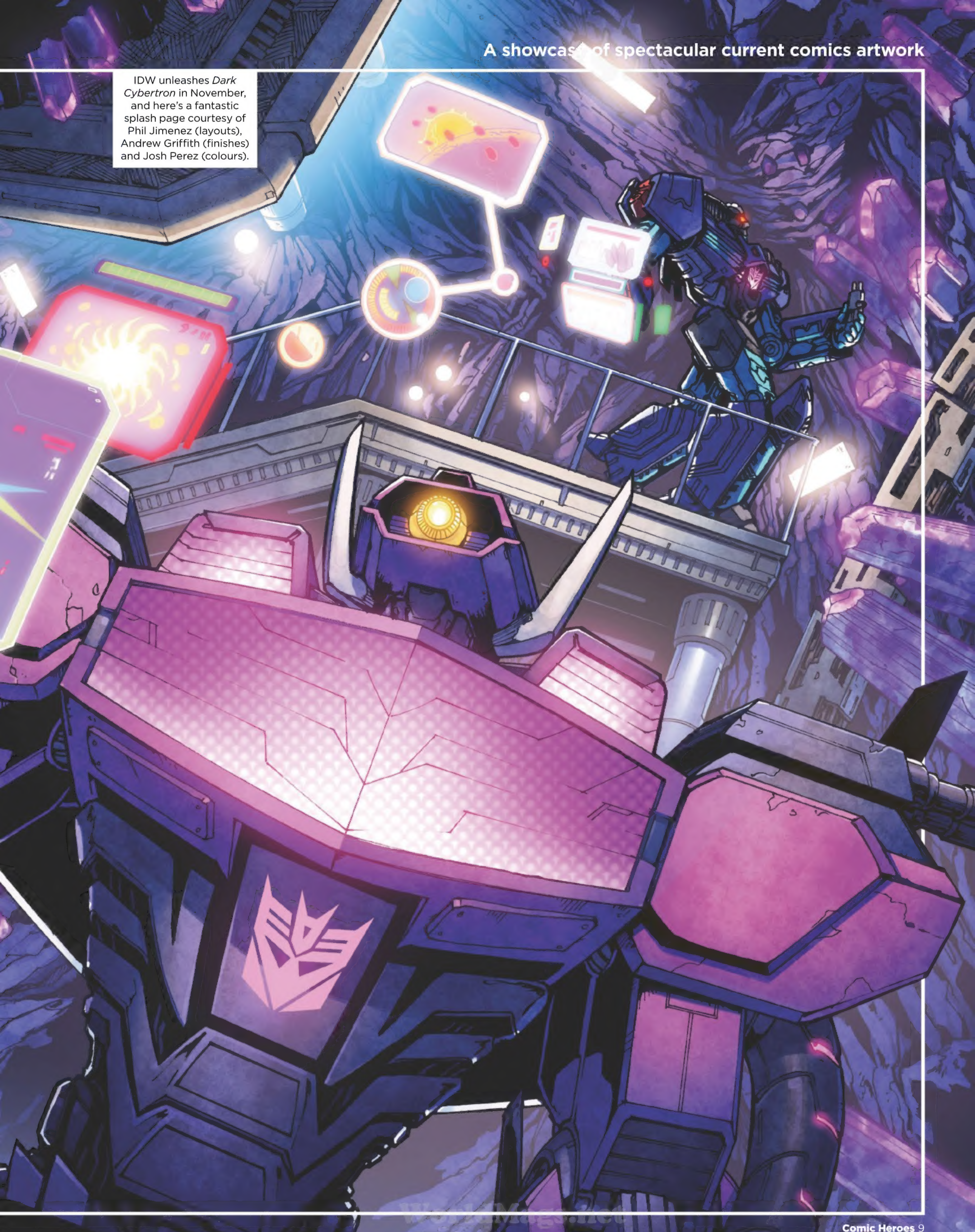

IDW unleashes *Dark Cybertron* in November, and here's a fantastic splash page courtesy of Phil Jimenez (layouts), Andrew Griffith (finishes) and Josh Perez (colours).

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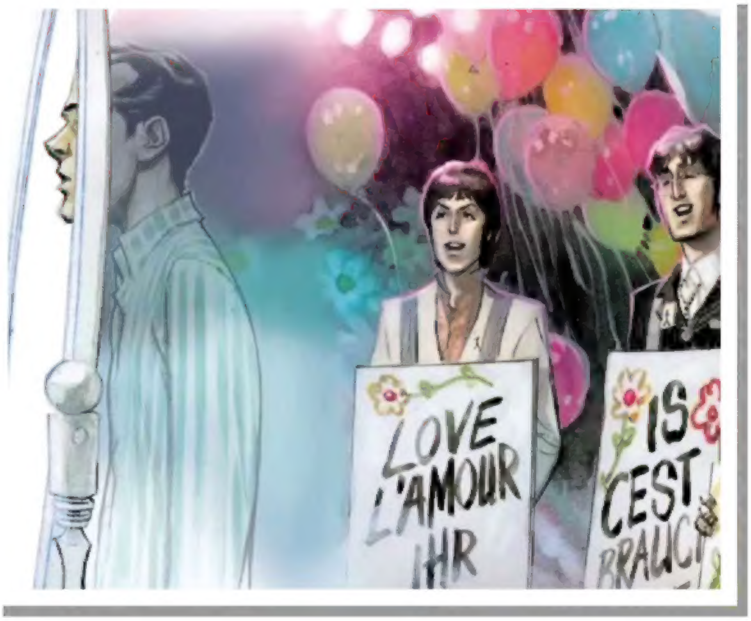
HEAT VISION

THE HOTTEST NEWS FOR ALL THINGS COMICS!

The Life Of Brian

The story of the manager who helped put The Beatles on the cultural map is celebrated in a graphic novel by a first-time comics writer with solid geek credentials. **By Stephen Jewell**



While countless biographies have been penned about the Fab Four over the past five decades, it's hard to believe that until recently so few books have been devoted to the life story of their late manager, Brian Epstein. But now the extraordinary tale of how the once lowly Liverpudlian music store employee-turned-influential showbiz impresario first discovered The Beatles, and then helped to change the face of popular music, has been chronicled in an ambitious new graphic novel.

Written by leading Broadway theatre producer Vivek Tiwary and lavishly illustrated by Andrew Robinson (*Superman/Batman*) and Kyle Baker (*Why I Hate Saturn*), *The Fifth Beatle* shines a light on one of the forgotten pioneers of rock 'n' roll.

HERE COMES THE SUN

"It's a story that I've been carrying around with me for so long that I've become a bit of an expert in it," Tiwary tells *Comic Heroes*. "So much of my knowledge is based on information that I've uncovered and it's a story that has been greatly inspiring for me."

Tiwary – who is simultaneously developing a screenplay for a possible feature film – has always seen *The Fifth Beatle* as a visual rather than a textual experience. "When I first thought of it, it was in terms of a colour palette," he explains. "It starts off in Liverpool 1961, which is very industrial, dark, grey and rainy, and that lends itself to black and white. The story ends in London in 1967, which was the dawn of the psychedelic era so we're about to enter the Summer Of Love. I saw it as a movement from black and white to Technicolor. In the early pages it's all very muted but if you look at it carefully, you'll see that when the band appear at the Cavern at around page 10, that's the first real burst of colour that you get. Then slowly we start introducing more and more colour until you get to Kyle Baker's pages and you're in full-on Technicolor with all sorts of cartoony images and tones."

An intricately-structured opus that visits both sides of the Atlantic as it charts The Beatles' dramatic rise to fame and fortune before concluding with Epstein's tragic fall from grace and eventual premature death, the 130-page story was a tough assignment for a relative newcomer to take on. "It was something that I've always wanted to do and it just felt like the right moment," he admits. "While I'd never written a comic before, I'm a long-time reader of them and a serious fanboy geek. I'd always buy the limited edition collections of my favourite books, which would have the 20-page script and other bonus material in the back. I'd compare the script with the finished panels so I was very familiar with the graphic novel format. Scott McCloud's *Understanding Comics* was also a huge reference point. I just set about doing it and like a lot of things in my career, I did it on my own."

COME TOGETHER

A member of burgeoning independent Valiant Entertainment's board of directors, Tiwary drew on his industry connections to recruit his artistic partners. "Apart from being really good at what he does, it was clear from our first meeting that Andrew is also a big Beatles fan and that we would be able to collaborate very well," he says of Robinson, who is responsible for the bulk of the artwork. "He's the kind of

> **"It's a story that I've been carrying around with me for so long"**

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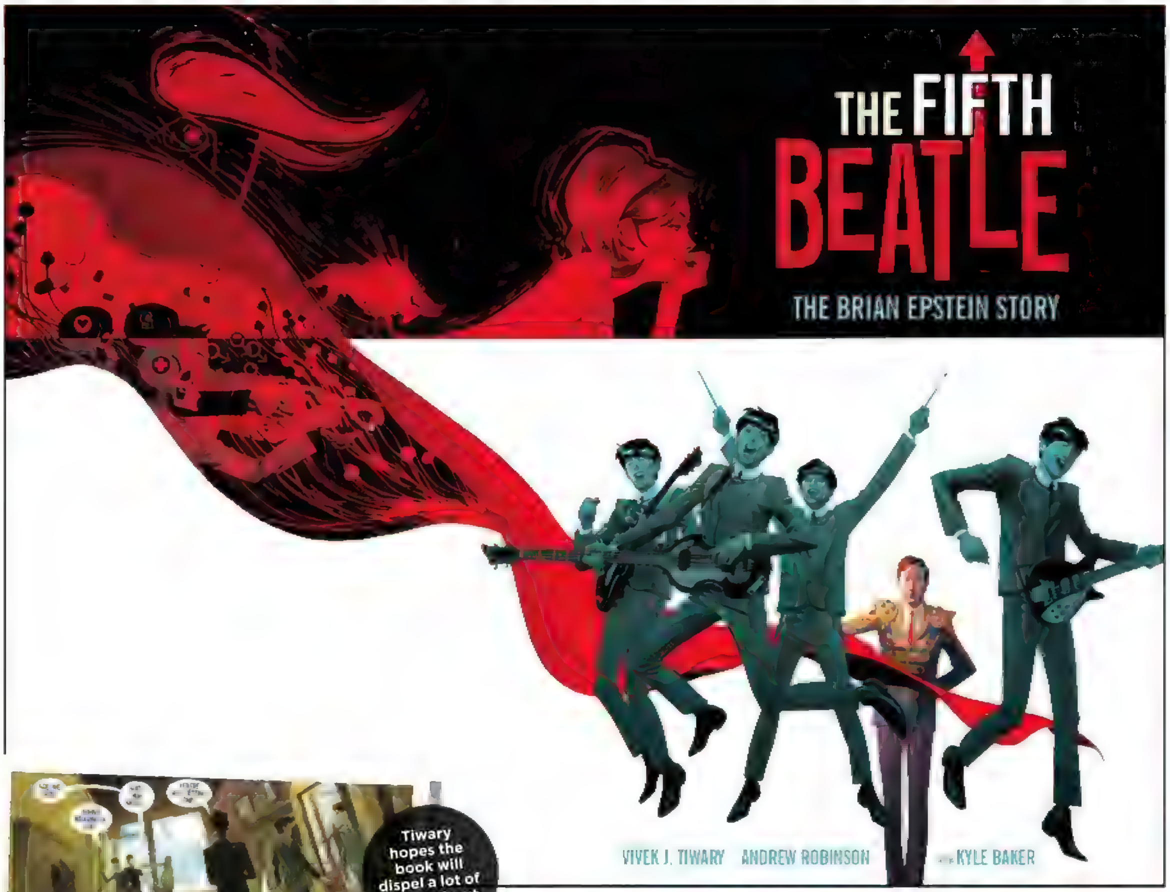
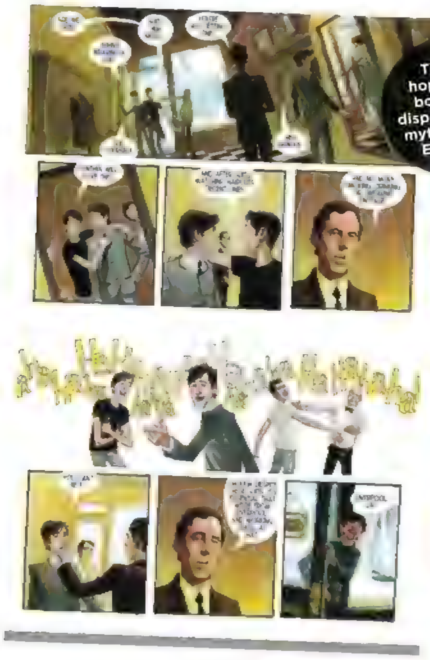
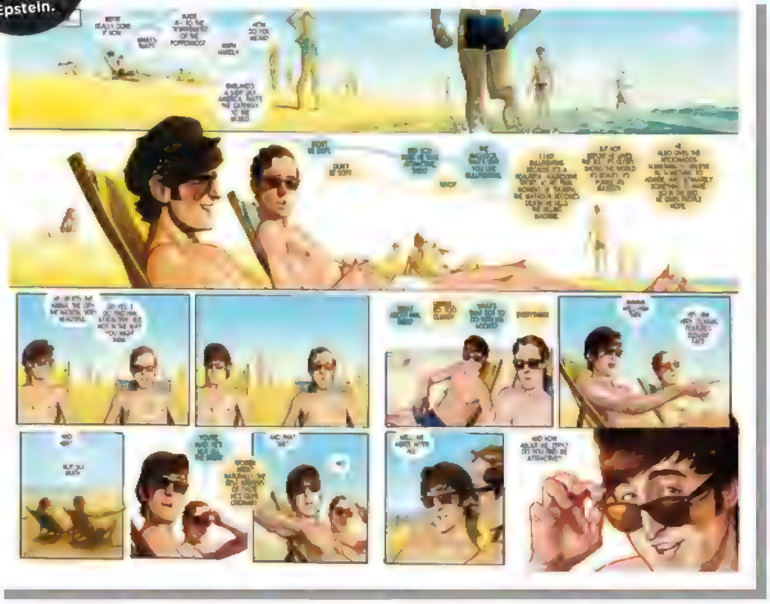




Tiwary hopes the book will dispel a lot of myths about Epstein.



guy who, if I had lots of photo reference and was very specific about how I wanted something to look, he was happy to take that direction. But there were some pages where I had no idea, and he would then get totally excited about how the artwork would tie into the storytelling. We just hit it off creatively on every level and it being my first graphic novel, working with an artist who was both A-list but also very open to collaborating was very important to me."

Meanwhile, Baker's more frenetic linework provides a lively contrast to Robinson's sumptuous, fully-painted pages. "Kyle is a New Yorker like me and we move in similar circles," says Tiwary. "He grew up watching the old Beatles cartoons, so when I wrote a sequence that kind of tipped its hat to that, knowing his talent and interest, it was very easy for me to pick up the phone to see if he was interested."

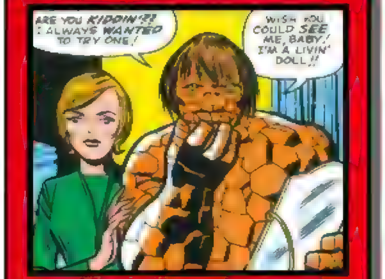
Significantly, The Beatles have inspired numerous comics in the past, most notably Grant Morrison's cult '90s series *The Invisibles*, in which the autobiographical main character King Mob channels the spirit of the late John Lennon. "I'm a huge fan of comics that attempt to convey that sense of magic and music," says Tiwary. "Alan Moore's work has been a huge influence on me and *From Hell* is a difficult book to get through. But it's very much about the magic that exists in the fabric of England in very much the same way as when Brian stands on the rooftop in *The Fifth Beatle* and says to Moxy, 'Magic and hope are returning to England tonight.' To me, that's not very removed from what Alan Moore, Grant Morrison and Neil Gaiman have done."

A composite of several real life individuals, Brian's personal assistant is the graphic novel's only purely fictional element. "Moxy is the only character in *The Fifth Beatle* who did not exist," explains Tiwary. "But everything she does is based on the things that one of four people did. We're telling a true story but it is an adaptation of what happened. I'm hoping that readers will expect a bit more poetry rather than something that is just about the truth." CH

***The Fifth Beatle** is out from Dark Horse on 19 November.*

BEATLEMANIA

A few Beatles comic appearances from the past...


ARE YOU KIDDIN'?? I ALWAYS WANTED TO TRY ONE!
WISH YOU COULD SEE ME, BABY! I'M A LIVIN' DOLL!!

The Thing in a Beatles wig (from *Fantastic Four* #34, 1965) we can handle, but...

STRANGE TALES
HUMAN TORCH
THING
THE BEATLES!

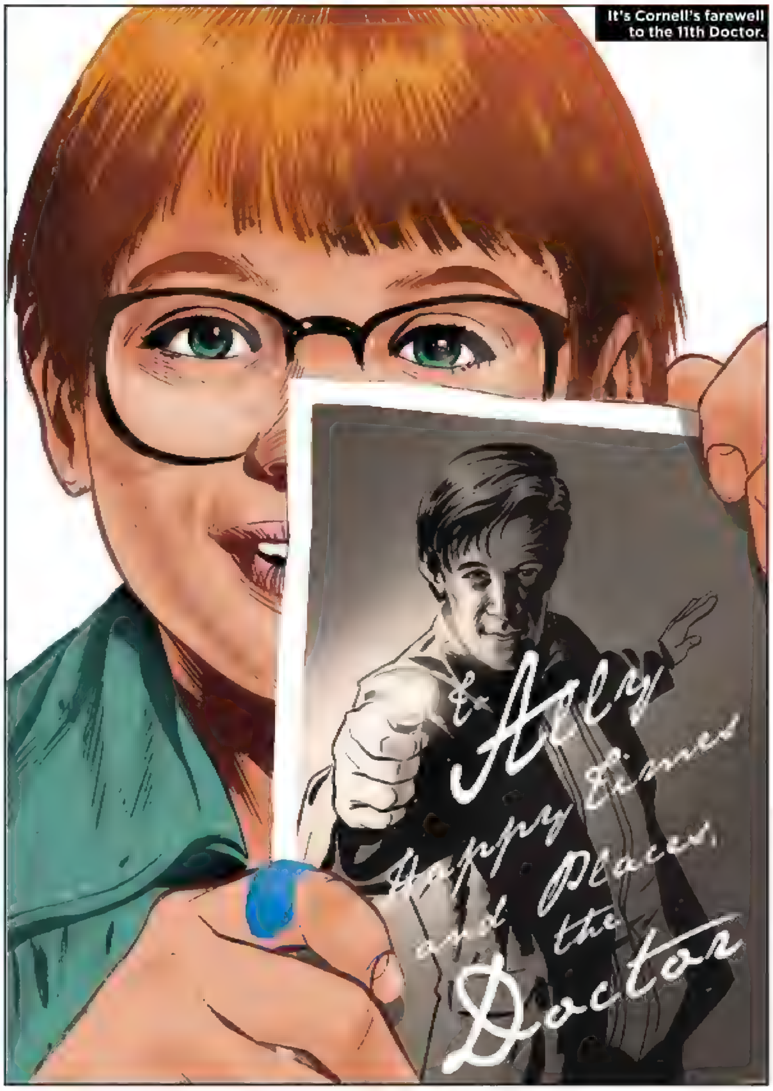
The Human Torch – in full "Flame On!" mode? We didn't know they sold them in an unstable molecules variety.

Batman gets caught up in the whole "Paul is dead" conspiracy that followed the release of *Sergeant Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*.

BATMAN
HERE
DEAD
ALBUM COVER!

A previous comic biography of The Beatles, by Marvel from 1974 (with art by George Pérez, allegedly...)

THE STORY OF THE BEATLES · PART TWO



It's Cornell's farewell to the 11th Doctor.

That's an Andy Warhol painting...

The real world and the Doctor's collide.

The End Of Eleven

Paul Cornell talks to **Stephen Jewell** about writing IDW's final *Doctor Who*

From the intergalactic Roman Empire of Pat Mills and Dave Gibbons's classic *Iron Legion* to the *Star Trek* universe of *New Generation* crossover *Assimilation*^{2}, *Doctor Who*'s comic book adventures have taken the Time Lord to numerous alternate realities over the past five decades. But nothing would have prepared him for the ordinary existence he encounters in IDW's *Doctor Who Special 2013* – the final offering from the San Diego independent before its US comics licence runs out at the end of the year – in which the Last Gallifreyan comes face to face with Matt Smith, the flesh and blood actor who is currently bringing his 11th incarnation to life on our TV screens.

Written by *Wolverine* scribe Paul Cornell and drawn by *Wool* artist Jimmy Broxton, *The Girl Who Loved Doctor Who* begins with the Doctor crossing paths with a 10-year-old fan of his long-running BBC series. "She's in a tough situation, and she looks to the Doctor for a way through," says Cornell.

Cornell's association with the Time Lord dates back to 1990, when he made his first contribution to Marvel UK's *Doctor Who* comic strip, but he's probably best known for the episodes he wrote for Christopher Eccleston's ninth Doctor and David Tennant's tenth Doctor in 2005 and 2007.

He has also written several titles for Virgin's *New Adventures* spin-off novel line, and believes that the iconic character's enduring appeal transcends the specific requirements of the various mediums. "There are obvious differences in approach," he says. "Comics are like a series of still frames of a TV show. I always use the past tense in my panel descriptions. Apart from that, I hope *The Girl Who Loved Doctor Who* feels like a TV episode."

The Christmas release will fittingly coincide with Matt Smith's sure to-be-tearful final outing in his trademark bow tie and fez. "It's my love letter to what *Doctor Who* has meant in my life," says Cornell. "It's been a thread that has run through my whole career, and, as a child, it was really necessary for me emotionally too. That's what the story is about, why we need the Doctor."

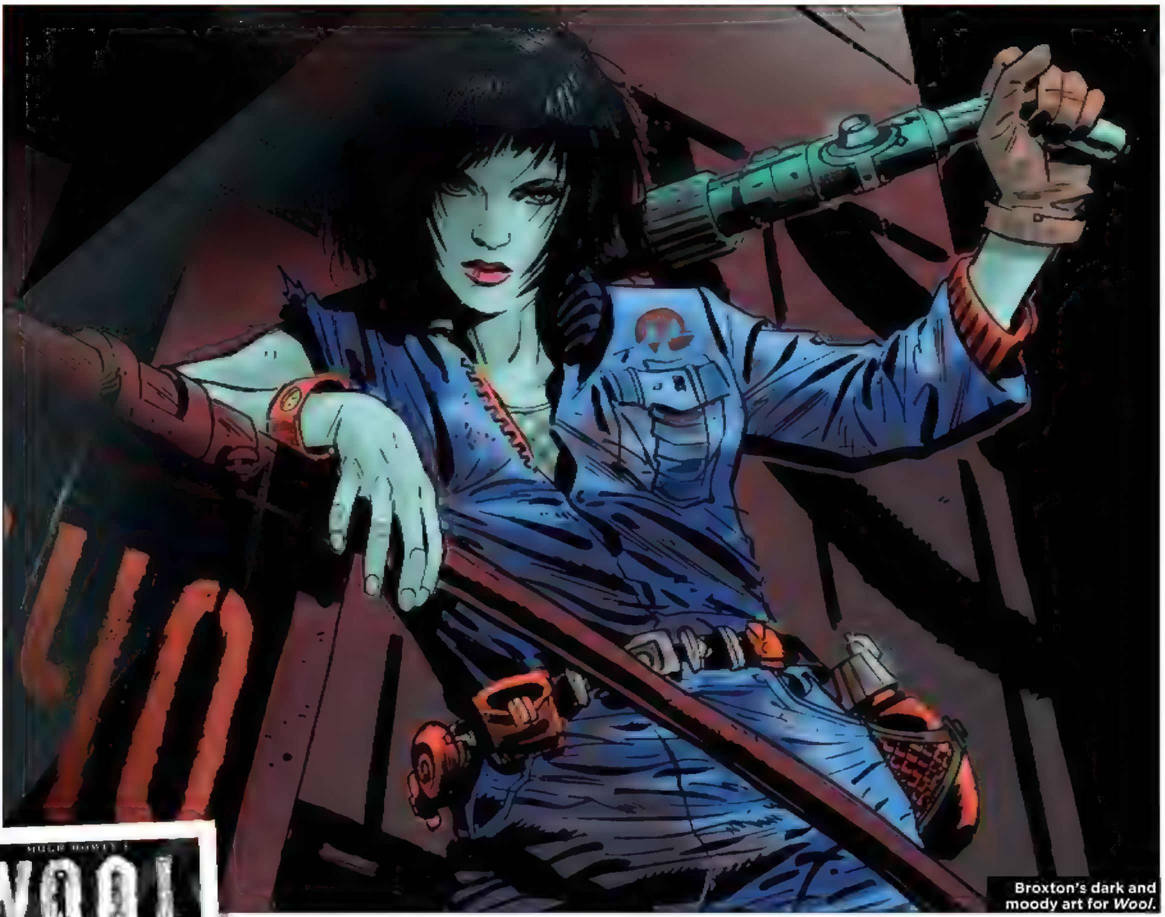
Cornell has previously penned an online short story for the BBC featuring Smith's Time Lord, so he already has a grasp of his distinctive verbal delivery and physical mannerisms. "I just soak up what the particular Doctor sounds like," he explains. "Matt's (actual) voice was harder, but I've seen enough interviews with him."

The haunting storyline recalled some unpleasant experiences for Cornell. "It's based hugely on my own memories of my school days; horrible and impossible as they are."

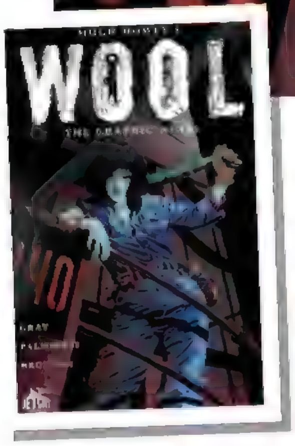
More positively, he is welcoming the opportunity to work with Broxton again, whom he last collaborated with on 2010 DC miniseries *Knight & Squire*. "He's one of my favourite artists," he adds.

***The Girl Who Loved Doctor Who** will be out in time for Christmas.*

> **“It's my love letter to what *Doctor Who* has meant in my life”**



Broxton's dark and moody art for *Wool.*



Kindling A Revolution?

Stephen Jewell checks out *Wool* from... *Amazon*??

An online bestseller even before its author signed a publishing deal, Hugh Howey's *Wool* is a perfect fit for Amazon's ambitious new Jet City Comics imprint. Adapted by seasoned co-writers Jimmy Palmiotti and Justin Gray, with art by Jimmy Broxton (*Knight & Squire*), the dystopian thriller about a group of lone survivors leading a perilous existence in a vast underground silo will first be released this month as a six-part Kindle Serial before being collected into a graphic novel next year.

"I love how that idea mirrors the original release of the books," says Howey of the fledgling line, which is also turning George RR Martin's *Meathouse Man* and Neal Stephenson's *The Mongoliad* into comics. "Most of my paycheck comes from Amazon and they've offered me the opportunity to participate in pilot programmes for some interesting stuff. And I love adventures and breaking new ground."

Praising Brit Broxton for having "such a unique style and work flow," the Florida-based author has taken an active role in the comic's production. "Jimmy and Justin have run all their scripts by me and I've made comments," says Howey, who promises that it will make for a different narrative experience to the novel.

"They really listened to my idea for how to lay out the first part of the book. We could have jumped straight to the main character, Jules, really early, but my idea – which I thought would please readers and mimic the book – was to tell Sheriff Holsten's story first. We then have Jules appearing on the last page, which is a great final scene, so when you get to #2 you know you're going to dive straight into her story."

Echoing the shared universe concept of Kindle World's fan fiction, which has seen budding authors contributing their own short stories to the *Silo Saga*, Howey hopes to eventually generate some original comic book material.

"If there's enough demand, we can go on and tell more stories," he says. "You could release a comic after this called *Silo 13*, which will be a completely different story with new characters. You could also tell more stories about (*Wool*'s main setting) Silo 18 and introduce new characters."

A dedicated comic book fan, Howey also plans to eventually contribute some stories himself. "I'd love to write comics," he declares. "Working on the graphic novel with the *Wool* team has given me the confidence that it's something I could do. Before that, I never really understood how to write a comic script so getting the chance to read what Jimmy and Justin have done has been a real education." **CH**

*Episode 1 of **Wool: The Graphic Novel** is available 11 November.*

FROM THE MAKERS OF SFX MAGAZINE

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People we're not sure exist:
- Someone who, at the age of 15, told their school career's advisor, "I want to letter comics"
- Someone who thinks they could fancy a woman if she was anatomically built like a female superhero
- An Irishman who talks like Banshee does when Chris Claremont writes him
- Someone who wants to see a Blu-ray director's cut of *Superman IV: The Quest For Peace* with all the Nuclear Man version one scenes put back in
- Batman

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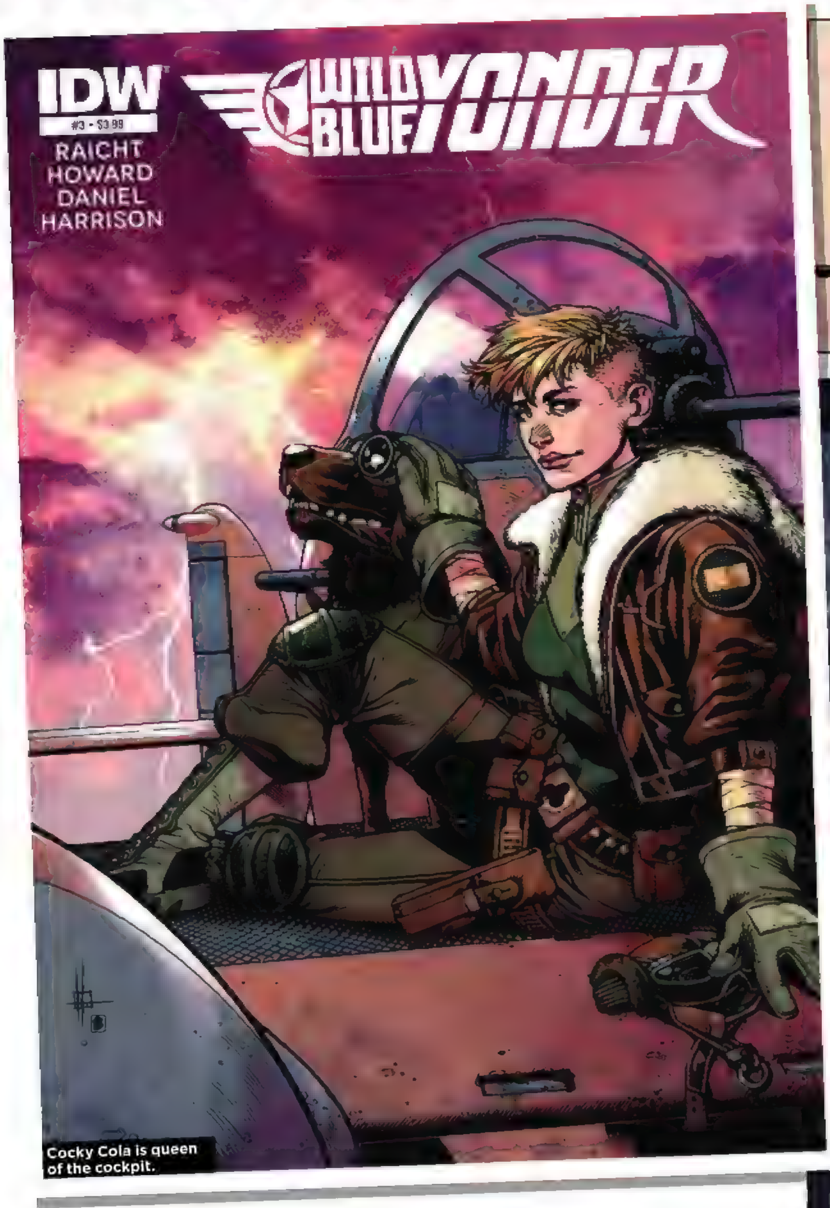
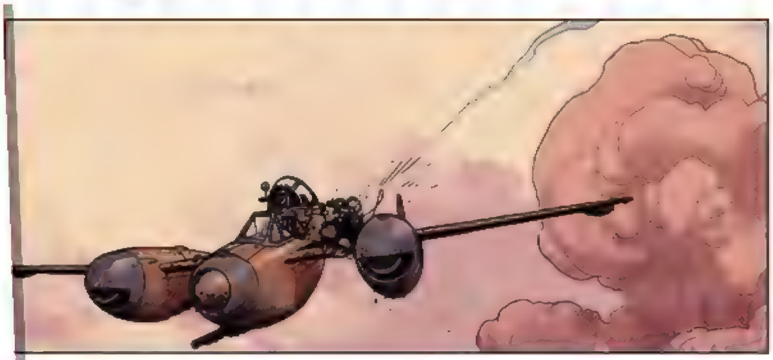
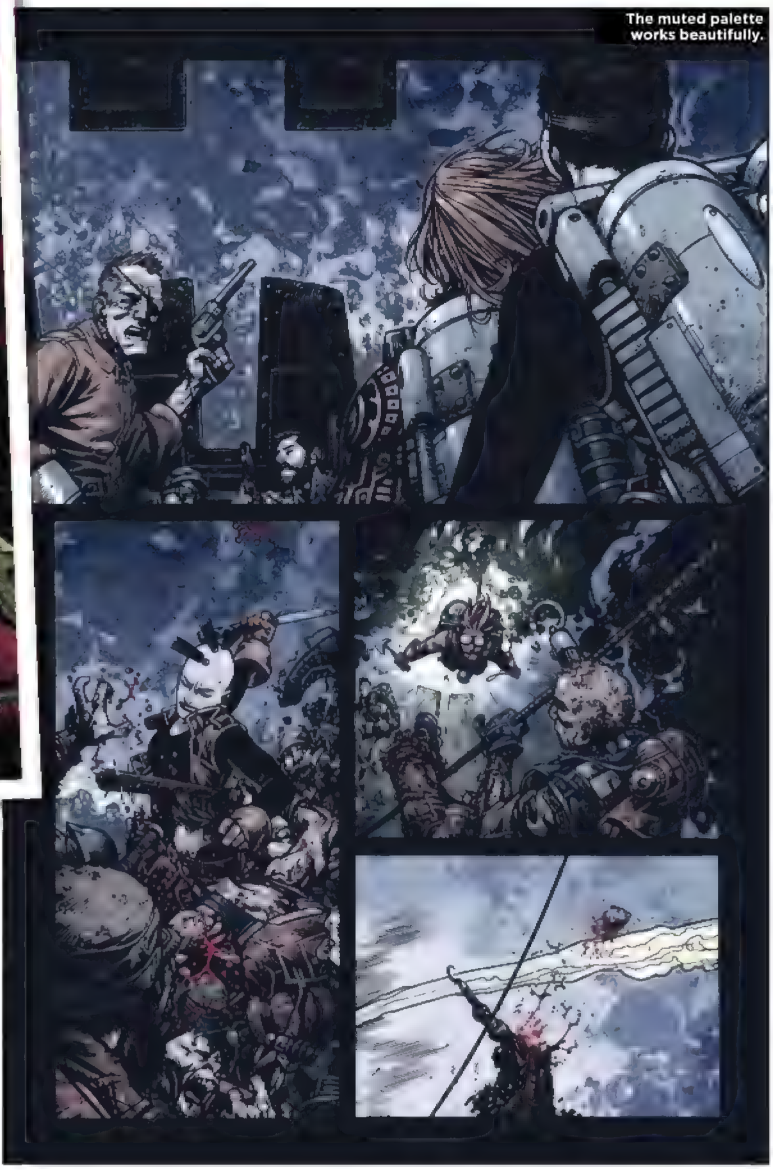


Cocky Cola is queen of the cockpit.





The muted palette works beautifully.

Wild Boys

IDW's new dystopia reaches for the skies. **Rob Power** talks to the creators of the new hit series

"You can never tell what people are going to enjoy," says Mike Raicht, and he should know. As a writer he's covered everything from the X-Men to heroic toys (with cult Th3rd World Studios title *The Stuff Of Legend*), and his latest project – sky-high dystopian action adventure *Wild Blue Yonder* – is already going great guns for IDW.

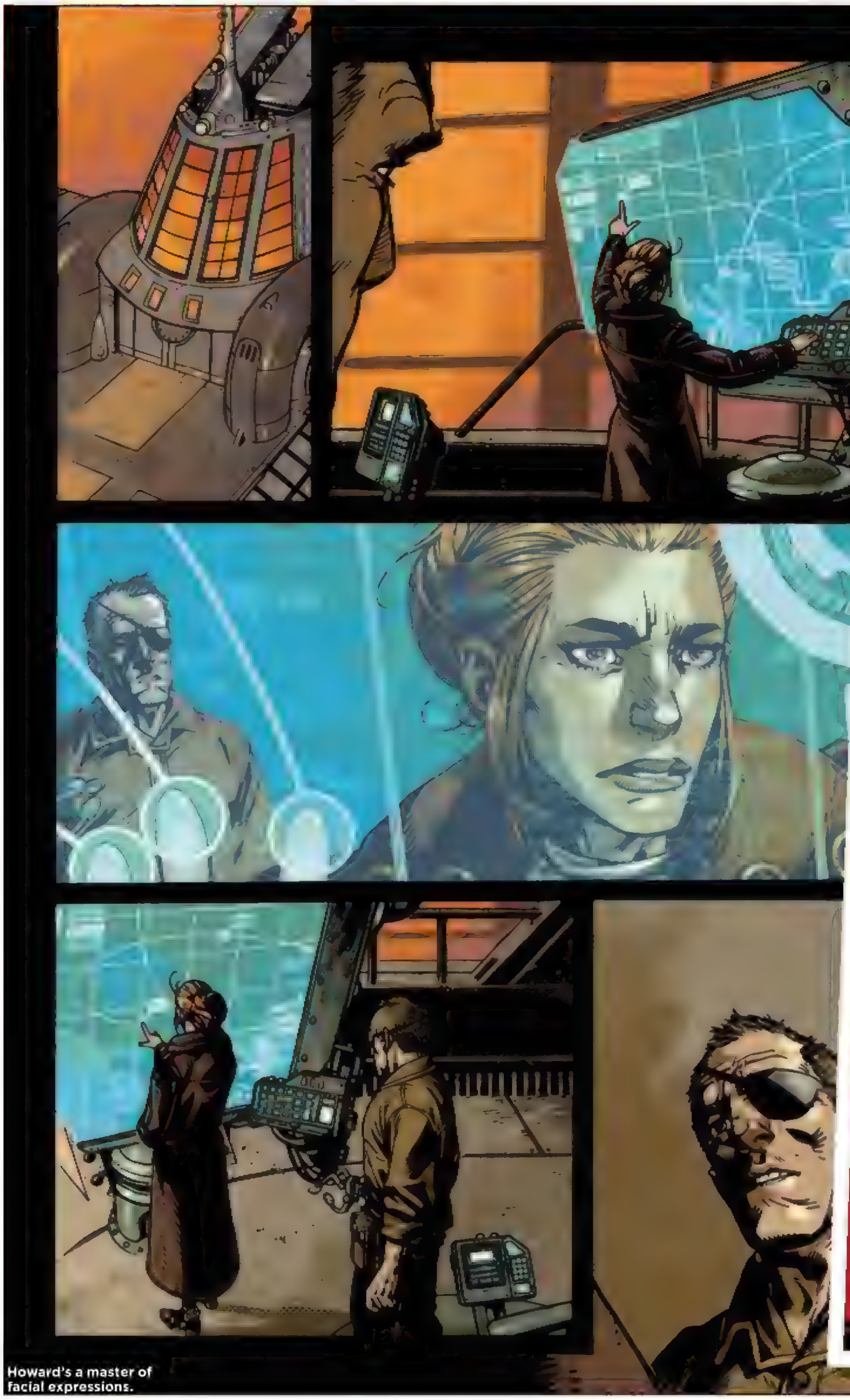
With the first issue selling out almost instantly, Raicht's instincts are clearly serving him well. "I knew we had amazing art on our book and that people would respond to that, but you can never tell how people are going to respond to the story. I do try really hard to write about things I love, or loved as a kid, something that I would have wanted to read."

Indeed, the genesis of the project came from some choice childhood memories of Raicht's, spliced together with jetpacks and the obligatory post-apocalyptic setting for good measure. "My grandmother used to sing me the Wild Blue Yonder song when I was young and it always stuck with me," he says. "She also told me stories about my great-uncles, who were both pilots during World War II, as well as my grandfather, who at 17 was a gunner on a boat in the Atlantic. I then mixed that with my love of post-apocalyptic worlds and pictured jetpack warriors flying through the skies fighting each other with aces and crowbars."

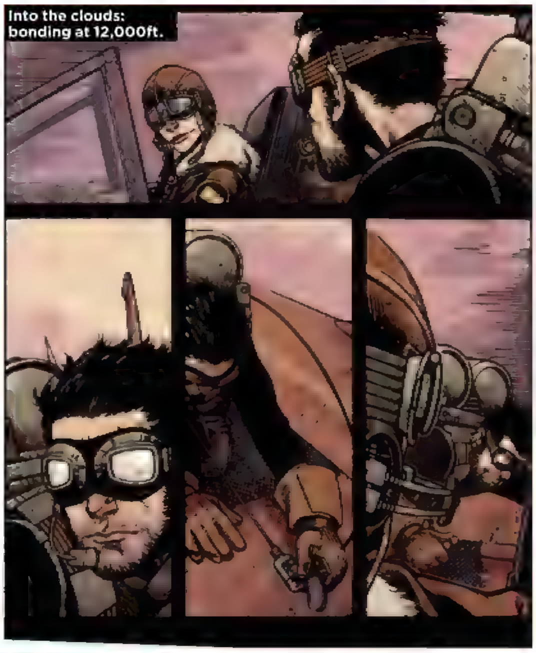
Putting together a team that included Zach Howard (*JLU*, *The Cape*) and Austin Harrison, Raicht made his sky-bound *Mad Max* a reality. "We always discussed this world as being a dead place, a place that is on the edge of an abyss, but that also has a dangerous beauty to it," says Raicht. "Zach and Nelson have delivered on that. They're amazing together."

"After I read his first write up of *WBY*, I immediately had visions of WW2

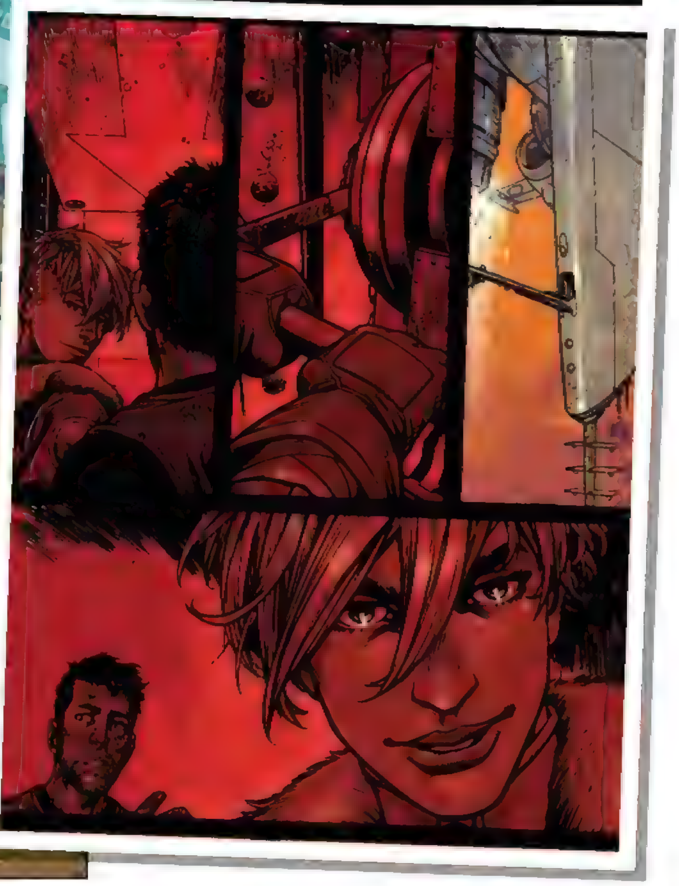
"Every single page is approached with the idea of achieving excellence"



Howard's a master of facial expressions.



Into the clouds: bonding at 12,000ft.



aircraft and blimps," says Howard. "I find that era's technology very romantic, and I tried to blend that with my futuristic designs. So the look of the series is WW2 tech mixed with all the ridiculous images I find bouncing around in my skull.

"As for the palette, I thought it would be interesting to almost never show the colour blue. So I started with a sepia-toned colour palette for the book, and slowly evolved that into the limited palette that we have now. We wanted the world to feel like it was very washed out and dirty."

With dystopias a particularly popular setting these days, the *Wild Blue Yonder* team also had to figure out how to avoid the clichés that are so often associated with broken futures. "I think they can always creep into writing from time to time," says Raicht. "Sometimes it just comes out and you want to fix them, but you have to move on or you'll drive yourself crazy. I'm lucky to have Austin and Zach here to beat them out of me. And if they suggest them, I can help in beating them out of them..."

"For me, it was about not letting myself be influenced by other apocalyptic work that has come before," says Howard. "Mike wrote a wonderful story involving dynamic characters, so it's easy not to have to lean on other creators' visions."

It's an approach that has worked wonders. *Wild Blue Yonder* gives familiar tropes a fresh spin and has had some pretty spectacular early sales to back up the confidence of its creators.

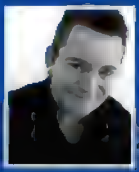
"We couldn't be happier, but it wasn't by accident either," says Howard. "We beat the path pretty hard for a year before the book was even on the shelf [*Wild Blue Yonder* is the product of a successful Kickstarter campaign]. Every single page of this book is approached with the idea of achieving excellence. We want our book to look and read like nothing that has come before it.

"Now, whether we have succeeded in that goal or not is subjective, but we feel that people who read the first two issues will understand the calories burnt trying to tell this story. Until I started working with Mike and Nelson, I was never able to break that mould – it takes a rare person to work at 100%, 100% of the time."

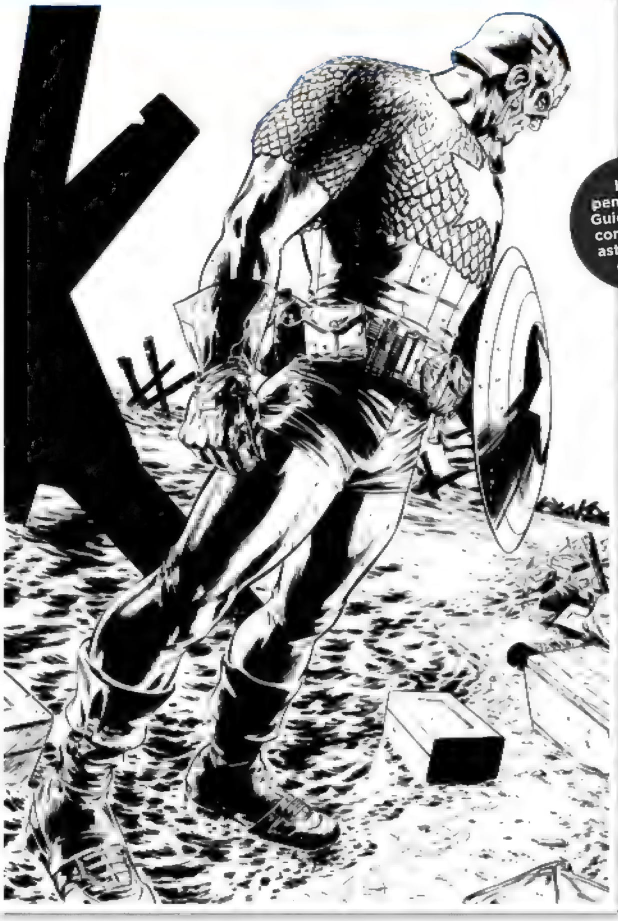
"I think the hard work paid off," concludes Harrison. "We're here to provide the fans with work we feel they deserve, and we hope that it shows." CH

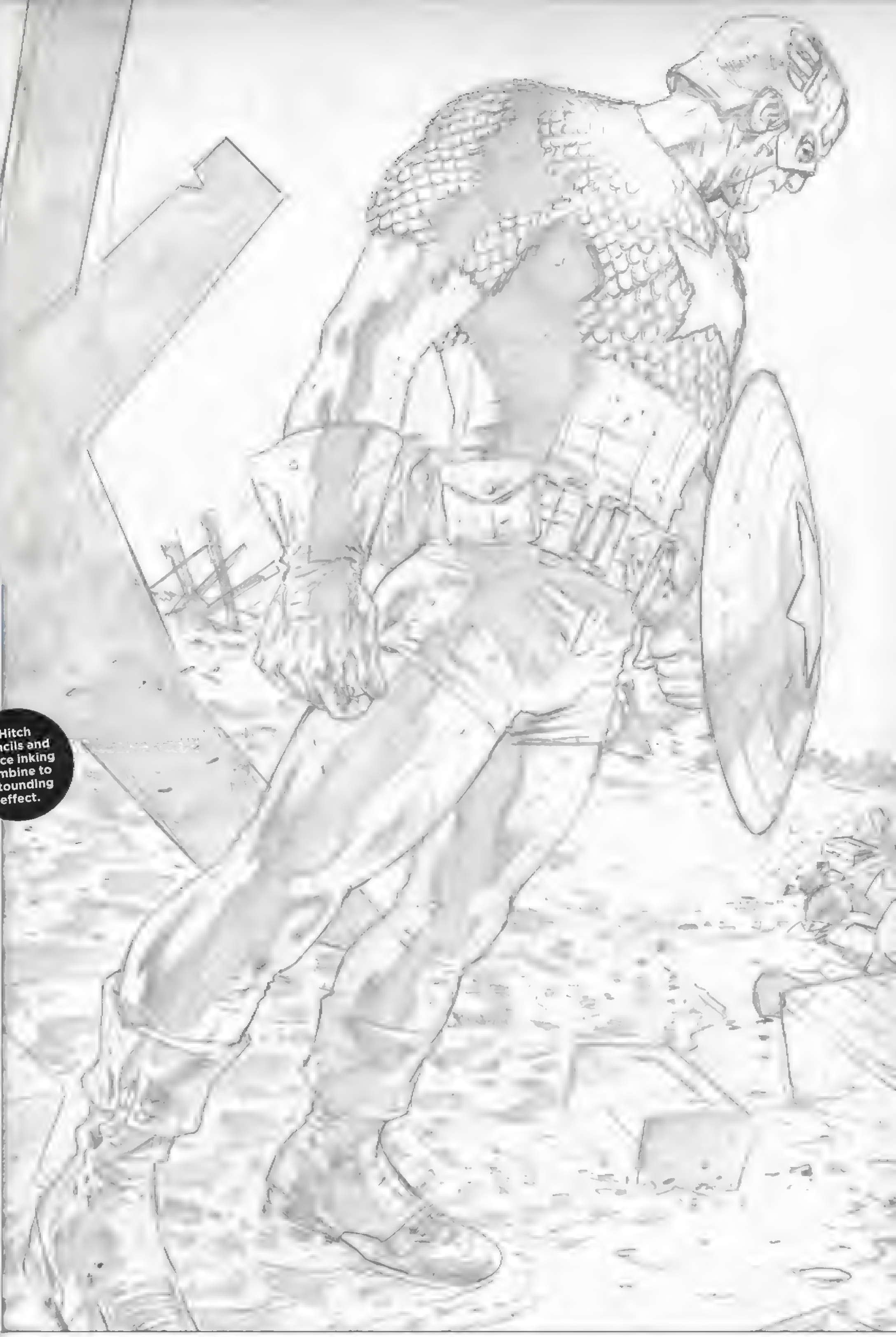
***Wild Blue Yonder** is available now.*

THE VIEW FROM A BOARD



Artist **Mike Perkins** likes behind-the-scenes comics team-ups too...





Hitch pencils and Guice inking combine to astounding effect.

There have been some great superhero team-ups over the years, but the ones I often love the most are first encounters between the two protagonists. From the initial collaboration between Captains Britain and America, through Judge Dredd battling a time-and-dimensionally-displaced Johnny Alpha, and on to the present with that massed flexing of muscles and aggressive attitudes known as Avengers vs X-Men.

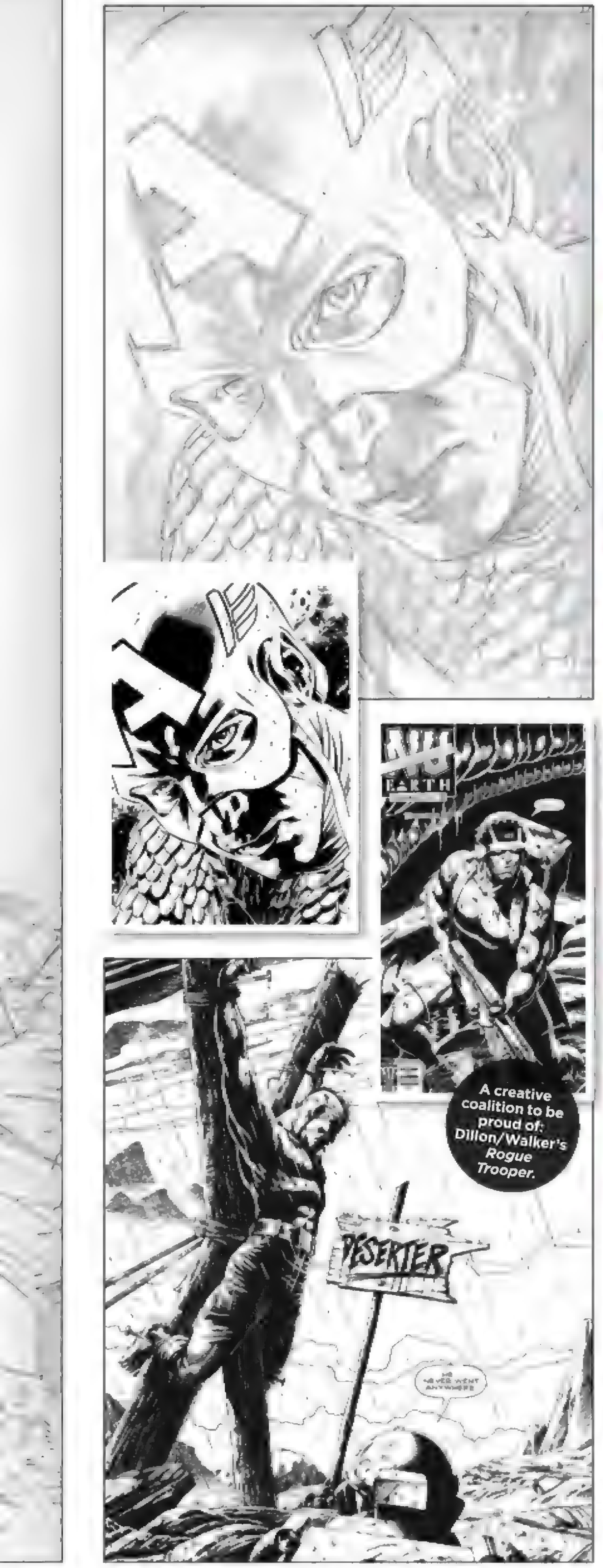
As much fun (admittedly the use of that word in this context is entirely subjective) as the *Punisher vs Archie* comic ended up being, the highlight, for me, was seeing how John Buscema's muscular art stood up alongside the cartoony Archie style.

Here, though, I want to explore the titanic team-ups which thrill me most: those unexpected alliances between two distinct creators. Somehow the combined ingredients mix and boil into an entrée of entirely unique textures and flavours. These partnerships are the Asian Bistro of comics. I've always loved Steve Dillon's artwork from his early days on *Nick Fury* in *Hulk Weekly* all the way up to his present output, and yet, in the rare moments he has been partnered with another artist, his already wonderful artwork has gained a patina of detail not always present in his own work. His collaborations with Kev Walker (and Phil Winslade in *Car Warriors*) have provided us with a look at an alternative-dimension Dillon.

> **“The combined ingredients mix and boil into an entrée of entirely unique textures and flavours”**

UNITED ARTISTS

The Steve Dillon of our Earth often provides us with the clearest of storytelling, pared down to its essential lines. The Dillon of Earth 2 brings us the same sequential storytelling chops but piles on the inked intricacies. The excellent *Rogue Trooper* story “Cinnabar” (*2000 AD* #624-630 & 633-635) is a high point in this specific Dillon/Walker alliance. The two artists – Kev Walker just starting out on his own startling comic career – provide us with a look at a debilitated Rogue infected with toxins and experiencing a Sin City biosphere of temptations

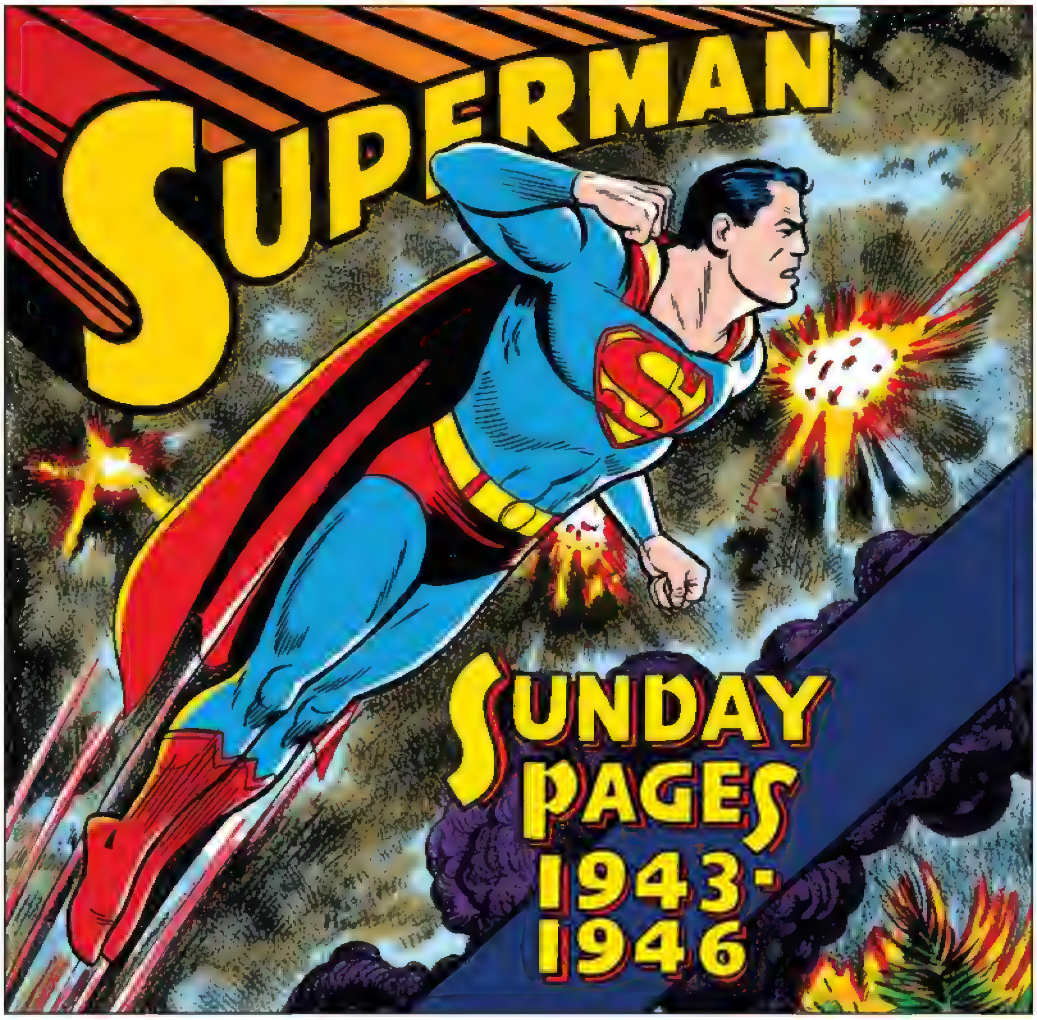


A creative coalition to be proud of: Dillon/Walker's *Rogue Trooper*.

and tribulations. John Smith, always an excellent and exciting writer, provides us with a trippy, debauched journey but it's the artwork here that initially grabbed me. The Dillon of Earth 2 is a Frankenstein creation composed of the best parts of both creators… and surely that's where the pre-eminent creative collaborations come from.

There are some associations that favour one or the other's abilities (such as the inking of Bill Sienkiewicz or Kevin Nowlan) but the best results come about with a bit of give and take on both sides. This is perfectly reflected in the titanic team-up of Bryan Hitch and Butch Guice on *Captain America: Reborn*. Either of these artists could have tackled this series on their own but the team-up provided us with an alternate look at both illustrators' abilities – each bolstering the other.

I look forward to another team-up from these two titans, and constantly search for more from other creators I respect. **CH**



Superman Strips! (Not in *that* way…)

Man of Steel's Golden Age American newspaper series set for coffee-table comeback

Superman newspaper strips that have never been reprinted since the Golden Age of the '40s are finally set to make a reappearance in a lavish new coffee-table book from IDW, in partnership with DC.

Superman: Golden Age Sundays – released in the UK on 31 December – will collect 170 strips that were syndicated in US newspapers from May 1943 through August 1946, beginning where the *Superman Sunday Classic* book by DC Comics and Kitchen Sink Press left off. These World War II-era stories feature work by legendary artists such as Wayne Boring and Jack Burnley. Further book collections of the newspaper strips will follow in the form of the 1950s *Atomic Age*, and the 1960s *Silver Age*.

"We're printing the series in an oversized 9.25" x 12" format," says editor Dean Mullaney, "so readers can fully enjoy these glorious full-colour tabloid Sundays."

The stories include the complete *Superman's Service To Servicemen* series, which ran from summer 1943 until a few months after World War II ended, in which Superman responds to requests from men and women of the armed services, as well as their family members back home.

The Man of Steel helps a wounded Army Air Corps pilot return home to witness the birth of his twins, solves numerous romantic misunderstandings, checks up on mothers for their worried sons overseas, all while simultaneously stopping enemy torpedoes, bombs, and bullets!

In a clever transition to the post-War world, there's a flashback to Superman's origin and Clark Kent's first assignment at the *Daily Planet*, followed by a thrilling interstellar saga in which Superman comes face to face with Queen Arda of the planet Suprania, who threatened to kill Lois Lane unless the Man of Steel agrees to become her King!

Each book in this series of seminal strips features an introduction by Mark Waid and covers drawn by Peter Poplaski. **CH**

SHAPERS OF WORLDS

Vertigo alignment

Peter Milligan

The titanically prolific Milligan has worked for *2000 AD* – most notably on the long-running serial *Bad Company* – Marvel, DC and various book publishers, but there's one outfit that keeps beckoning him back... because they both like "edgy"

By Joel Meadows

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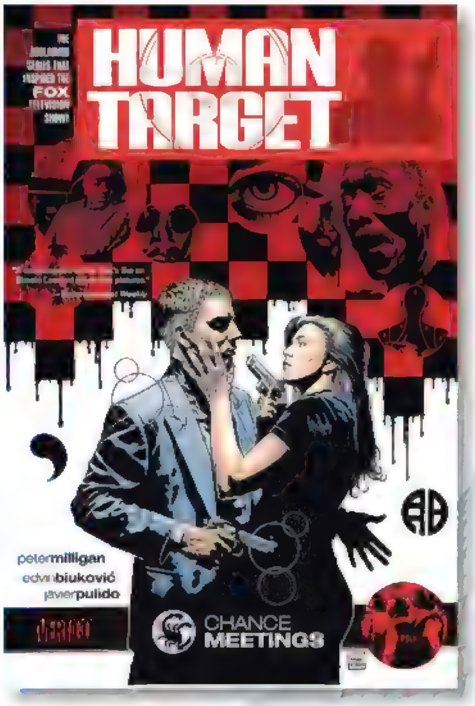


"Erotic." "Adult." "Edgy." "Dark." "Weirder sex." Yep, Seems you can take Peter Milligan out of Vertigo, but you can't take Vertigo out of Peter Milligan, if his words to describe his latest project are anything to go by. The British comic writer, who started out on *2000 AD*, has built up a following for his darkly satirical work through series such as *Shade The Changing Man*, *Hellblazer*, *X-Force* and *The Human Target*. He makes regular sojourns into the worlds of Marvel and DC but he keeps on returning to his spiritual home at Vertigo. Having finished his run on the publisher's *Hellblazer* comics last year, he's back with them for his new series, *The Discipline*.

Comic Heroes caught up with him to find out more about this series, what it is about Vertigo that means it's still the place for his more challenging material, and what else he's been up to...

Comic Heroes: *The Discipline* is your latest ongoing series for Vertigo. What is it, after all these years, that still makes Vertigo the natural home for your material?

Peter Milligan: "Vertigo is still willing to take risks. *The Discipline*'s themes are adult and the artwork and storytelling are bold, and at times graphic, and do not look away when our characters enter the bedroom. Vertigo still feels like the natural home for this kind of adult, edgy material. A lot of the stories I'm naturally drawn to are edgy and perhaps dark and Vertigo understands this kind of material."

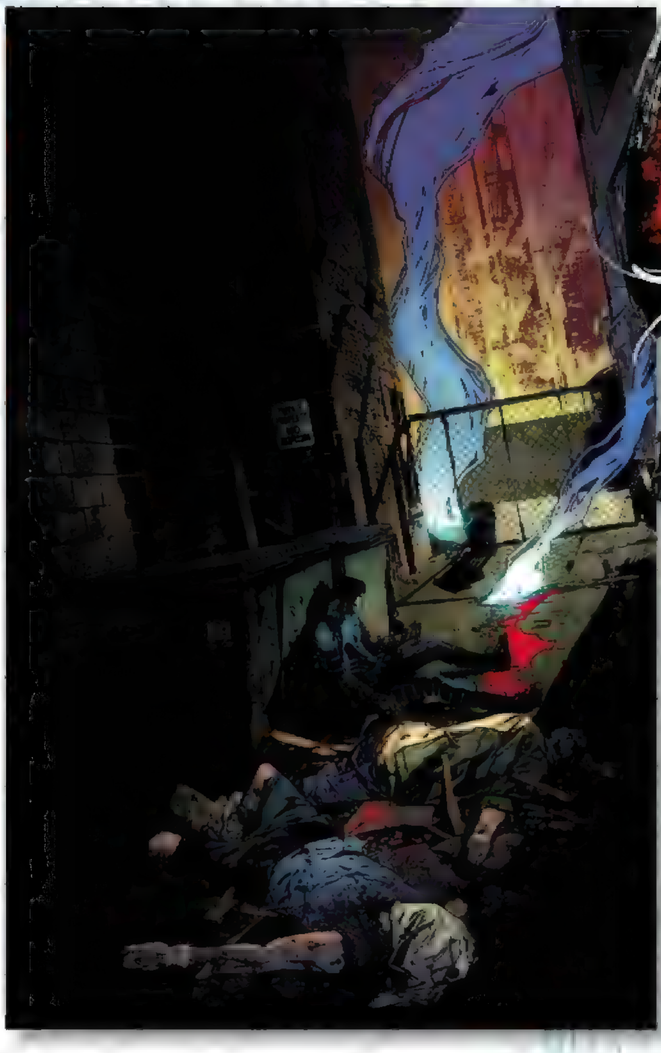
CH: How much can you tell us about it?

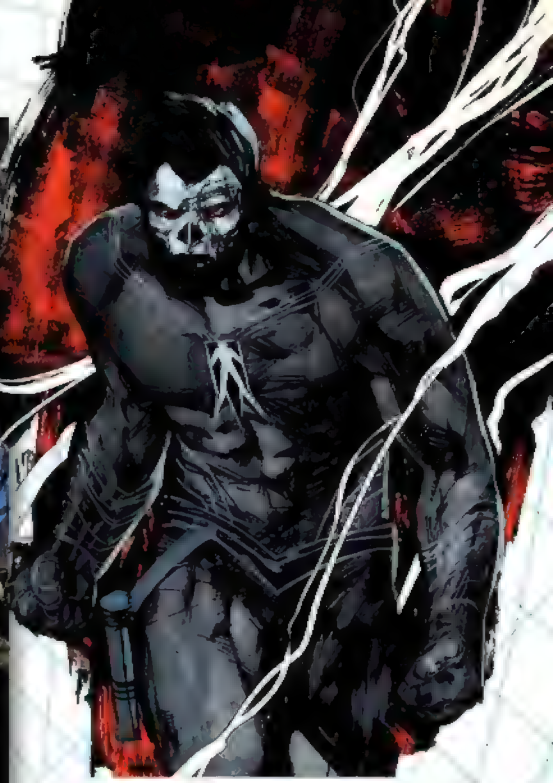
PM: "It's an edgy erotic supernatural thriller which, though set mainly in New York, takes place across many countries and many time periods.

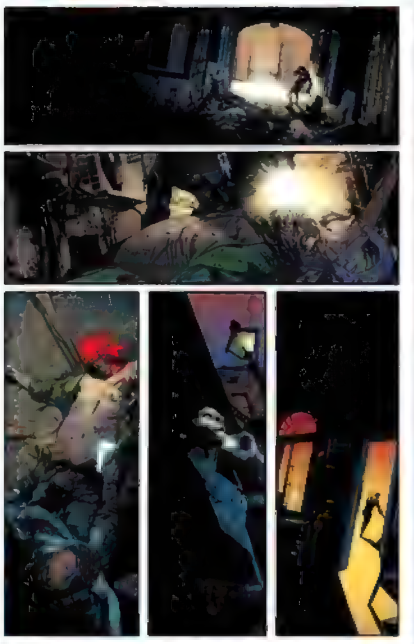
"Though *The Discipline* travels to some very dark places, it is, at its heart, about a young woman trying to juggle the different aspects of her life, a kind of ultimate multi-tasking in the face of weird creatures, weirder sex, and a dysfunctional family she can't quite leave behind."

CH: Artist Leo Fernandez has drawn a number of different series, including *Conan* and *Queen*

JOHN CONSTANTINE
HELLBLAZER







Above left: Milligan's long run on *Hellblazer* – which started with a short story in #250 – ended when the series was axed last year.
Above and right: *The Discipline* appears to have all the dark, bloody and brutal boxes well and truly ticked.

***& Country*. What do you think he brings to the series as an artist?**
PM: "We really thought hard about the right artist for *The Discipline*. The artist has to be able to handle characters, have a wild imagination, and capture that kind of urban fizz that is the milieu of the story. Leo brings all this. His work is very sexy but more importantly he can really capture characters in an urban setting."

CH: You seem drawn to outsiders as your protagonists. Is the main character in this series an outsider and what is it about outsiders that appeals to you?
PM: "I wouldn't say the protagonist in *The Discipline* is an outsider. She's a kind of social chameleon, coming from a working class background and now living a high-end, wealthy lifestyle in Manhattan. Indeed, when she's drawn into the world of *The Discipline* she becomes, in a sense, an insider."

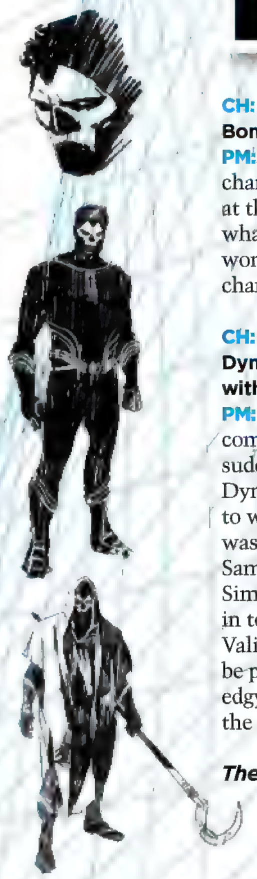
CH: *The Discipline* is your first creator-owned series after a few years working for DC. How did you find writing mainstream comics fare?
PM: "I think I did some good stuff. There were certainly some storylines I liked. But it's fair to say that the creator-owned type of comic – whether that's *Hellblazer*, *The Discipline* or *Terminal Hero* – plays more to my natural strengths."

CH: Your creator-owned series have often tackled the darker side of humanity. We assume that *The Discipline* will also tackle the sleazier and darker elements of the human psyche?
PM: "I think it's fair to say that, yes."

CH: How closely have you worked with Fernandez?
PM: "Closely, on the visual side of things. Leo is very diligent and enthusiastic when it comes to throwing around visual ideas on characters and places, which allows us all to have our say. Just recently he did a great design of our protagonist's swanky midtown apartment. We won't use all of it but it's fantastic to have."

CH: How far ahead have you plotted *The Discipline*'s story?
PM: "About a year, quite detailed. And then I know the more general direction I want it to take after that. *The Discipline* isn't a 'safe' book, so God knows how long it'll go on for."

> **" A lot of the stories I'm naturally drawn to are edgy, and perhaps dark "**



CH: How different is Vertigo with Shelly Bond, rather than Karen Berger, at its head?
PM: "I'm not sure yet. Things had been changing for a while, even with Karen still at the top. Shelly is great and really knows what she's doing but of course she's her own woman. The full ramifications of all the changes won't be known for a while yet."

CH: You're also writing *Terminal Hero* for Dynamite. What made you decide to go with a publisher outside of Marvel and DC?
PM: "Just a happy coincidence of events. I'd come off of my exclusive with DC and was suddenly 'free'. I've known Nick Barruchi at Dynamite for years and he'd been asking me to write something for him. *Terminal Hero* was an idea I'd had brewing for a little while. Same with Valiant. I know editor Warren Simons from his Marvel days and we'd kept in touch. So I'm just beginning to work for Valiant, taking over *Shadowman*. This will be pitched somewhere between the very edgy darkness of a Vertigo-style comic and the more mainstream fare of DCU." CH

***The Discipline* launches this December.**

Loving the alien

Peter Hogan

He's a doctor, he's from another planet, and he's trapped on Earth. There are no police boxes in *Resident Alien*, but there is a murder...

By Stephen Jewell

From Superman to Skizz, comic book history is full of extraterrestrials who have adopted this humble green globe as their home away from home. But none have made themselves quite as comfortable in their newfound surroundings as Dr Harry Vanderspeigle, the reluctant otherworldly hero of Peter Hogan and Steve Parkhouse's Dark Horse series *Resident Alien*.

Content to keep a low profile in the small US town of Patience, he was persuaded to take on the role of town doctor in last year's inaugural mini *Welcome To Earth!* before being embroiled in a sinister murder mystery. Now Hogan and Parkhouse have returned for a second three-parter, *Suicide Blonde*, which sees Dr Harry still failing to lead the quiet life that he so desperately desires.

Having first collaborated with the veteran *Bojeffries Saga* artist two decades ago on Vertigo's long defunct *Sandman*-themed anthology *The Dreaming*, *Resident Alien* has provided Hogan with a platform to come into his own after scripting several series of Alan Moore's science hero *Tom Strong* for DC, including the just-released *Planet Of Peril*. A one-time editor of Fleetway's late lamented creator-owned titles *Crisis* and *Revolver*, Hogan has evidently developed a taste for doing his own thing. In partnership with artist Phil Winslade, he also recently embarked on suburban fantasy *King's Road*, which was initially serialised in the pages of *Dark Horse Presents* before spinning off into its own series next year. "Steve and I did two *Dreaming* stories together and we both really enjoyed it and felt we were a good team," Hogan tells *Comic Heroes*. "We wanted to team up again, and Steve wanted to do something that involved aliens, and *Resident Alien* is what I came up with."

Comic Heroes: You started out on the other side of the desk. How did you make the transition from editing to writing comics?
Peter Hogan: "Writer friends had been telling me for years to have a go at scripting myself, but I'd never really found the confidence to start. Then, round about the time that *Revolver* closed down, I found myself editing [Fleetway's 1991] *Comic Relief* comic. I was sitting at a computer keyboard alongside Neil Gaiman and Richard Curtis while we jointly knocked the script into shape – and for me there were quite a few, 'Oh, so that's how you do it,' moments. It clarified the whole process for me, and the *Comic Relief* thing ended up including my first real scripting work, on the Doctor Who meets Dan Dare segment. So after that I wrote more scripts, and I haven't stopped yet."

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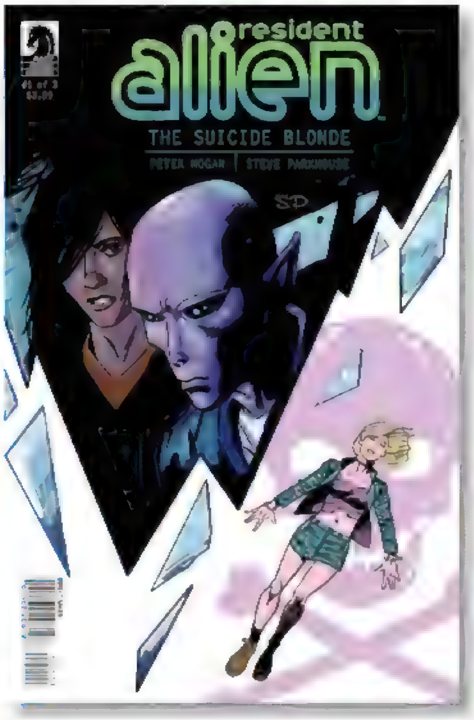
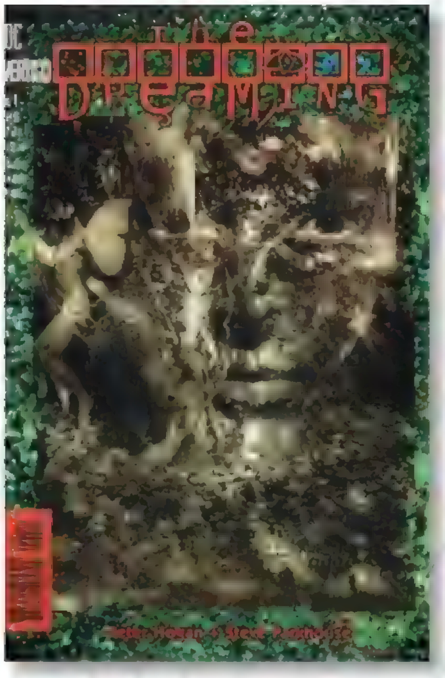
> **"I know exactly who Tom Strong is, but with Harry the alien I'm still finding out"**

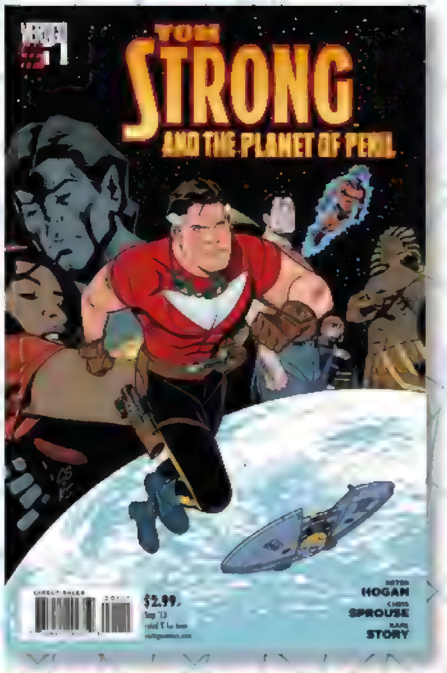


CH: How does developing more personal projects like *Resident Alien* compare to penning other people's creations?
PH: "The biggest difference is that when you're writing someone else's characters you've kind of already got a map to start with, whereas when you're writing your own you're to some extent drawing the map yourself as you go along. It's like I know exactly who Tom Strong is, but with Harry the alien I'm still finding out."

CH: Seeing as *Resident Alien* takes place in an archetypal American small town, would you cite classic '80s sci-fi films such as *ET*, or even more contemporary homages like *Super 8*, as inspirations?
PH: "Not really. You're influenced to some extent by everything you ever see or read, but I wouldn't have picked those ones especially. I



resident alien
DARK HORSE COMICS
#1 of 3
>>PETER HOGAN
>>STEVE PARKHOUSE



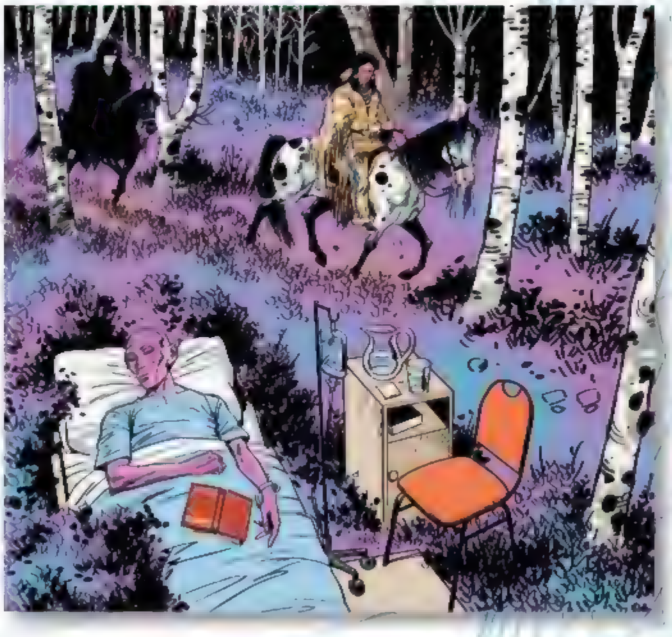
suppose *The Man Who Fell To Earth* was in the back of my mind as a vague influence, as was the old *My Favorite Martian* TV show.”

CH: In *Welcome To Earth!* you provide scant details about exactly how Dr Harry arrived on this planet. Will we find out more about his background in *Suicide Blonde*, especially as the Feds are now on his tail?

PH: “I always intended Harry’s backstory to unfold very slowly, so you’ll get some more fragments of it in this series and in all the other series that will follow, such as glimpses of his alien home-world, his crash and its aftermath, his time on Earth before arriving in the town of Patience, and the agency that’s trying to find him.”

CH: What can you tell us about *Suicide Blonde*? Nothing to do with INXS’s 1990 hit of the same name, presumably?

PH: “I’ve never knowingly heard that song. The title is taken from an expression from the ’50s or earlier, which is usually attributed to the novelist Saul Bellow. Anyway, it seemed to fit with this story, which concerns a young woman who appears to have committed suicide… except that it then begins to look like it may have really been a murder that was made to look like suicide. And if it actually was murder, then one of Harry’s friends is a major suspect, so Harry has to get involved with the case in order to clear him.”



CH: As for *King’s Road*, does it have anything to do with the famously fashionable west London destination?

PH: “It’s got nothing at all to do with the Chelsea street, though I did work there once. *King’s Road* came about because I wanted to do a fantasy story – not having written any fantasy material since I did all the *Sandman* spin-offs. Since fantasy storylines often revolve around people from our world going to some fantastic other place, I just decided to reverse the process, and have people from the fantastic place coming here – that’s the first part of the story, anyway.”

CH: *King’s Road* is about a being from a semi-magical realm who bases himself on this mortal plane, while *Resident Alien* is also about a stranger living amongst us. Is there a thematic link between the two?

PH: “Only in the sense that they’re both by definition outsiders, which is a fairly common story ingredient. But they’re very different types of story, and different types of character too. Harry desperately wants to go home, but is stuck here and is making the best of it, whereas Donal in *King’s Road* came here decades ago to start a new life, and is forced into leaving again because it’s the honourable thing to do, and also because he and his family will be killed if they stay put.”

Above left: Hogan got his gig on Vertigo’s *The Dreaming* on the back of his work for *2000 AD*.
Above: *Suicide Blonde* kicks off with a mysterious dream sequence.
Above right: Hogan has also penned *Tom Strong* for DC and *King’s Road* for *Dark Horse Presents*.

Resident Alien: Suicide Blonde **is out now.**

Hinterkind of magic

Ian Edginton

What if the post-apocalyptic world of *I Am Legend* had *actually* been populated by legends instead of zombies? That's the question Ian Edginton seems to be pondering.

By Joel Meadows

Ian Edginton has built quite a reputation for himself as a writer, thanks to his uniquely British work on series such as *Ampney Crucis* and *Red Seas* for *2000 AD* and his regular collaborations with artist D'Israeli on titles such as *Scarlet Traces* and *The War Of The Worlds*. *Hinterkind*, published by Vertigo/ DC, is his first ongoing series for DC's mature imprint and we caught up with him to talk myths and legends, ogres and trolls, and why an addiction to networking and social media could be the death of us all…

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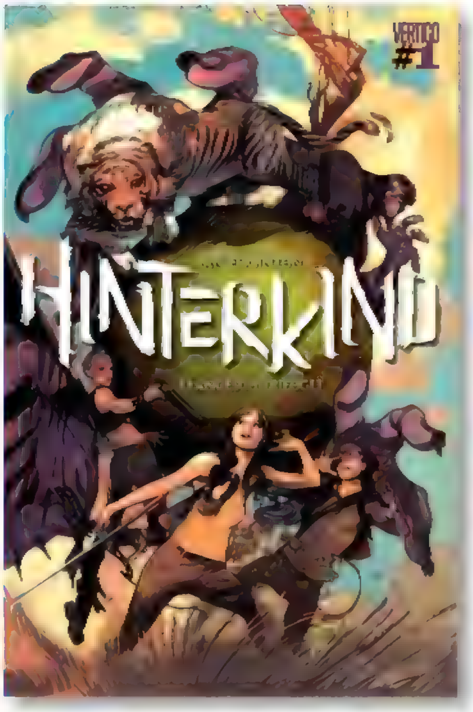
Comic Heroes: *Hinterkind* is your first ongoing series for quite some time. How did it come about?
Ian Edginton: "Well, I've been writing various ongoing series for *2000 AD* for close to 10 years but this is my first regular US book in a while. I've always been fascinated by post-apocalyptic stories: what would the world be like if mankind was no more or, at the very least, had one foot out of the door? It's the kind of ultimate 'What if?' I know that's not an entirely original thought – it's been the subject of umpteen science fiction movies, television shows and *National Geographic* documentaries – but it's not the idea itself that was important, more that it served as a springboard for what followed.

"The series is also based on the suggestion that Neanderthals and Cro-Magnon man existed at the same time. That they interacted, inter-bred or (in the Neanderthals case) were wiped out by their evolutionary neighbours. Suppose then, that the creatures we built our myths and legends on actually existed? Not as mystical, magical things but flesh and blood beings, red in tooth and claw.

"Imagine that they were evolutionary try-outs, dead-ends and asides, hunted and hounded to the edges of the world by a fearful mankind. Now their fortunes have turned and the world is theirs for the taking. These two ideas became my springboard for *Hinterkind*."

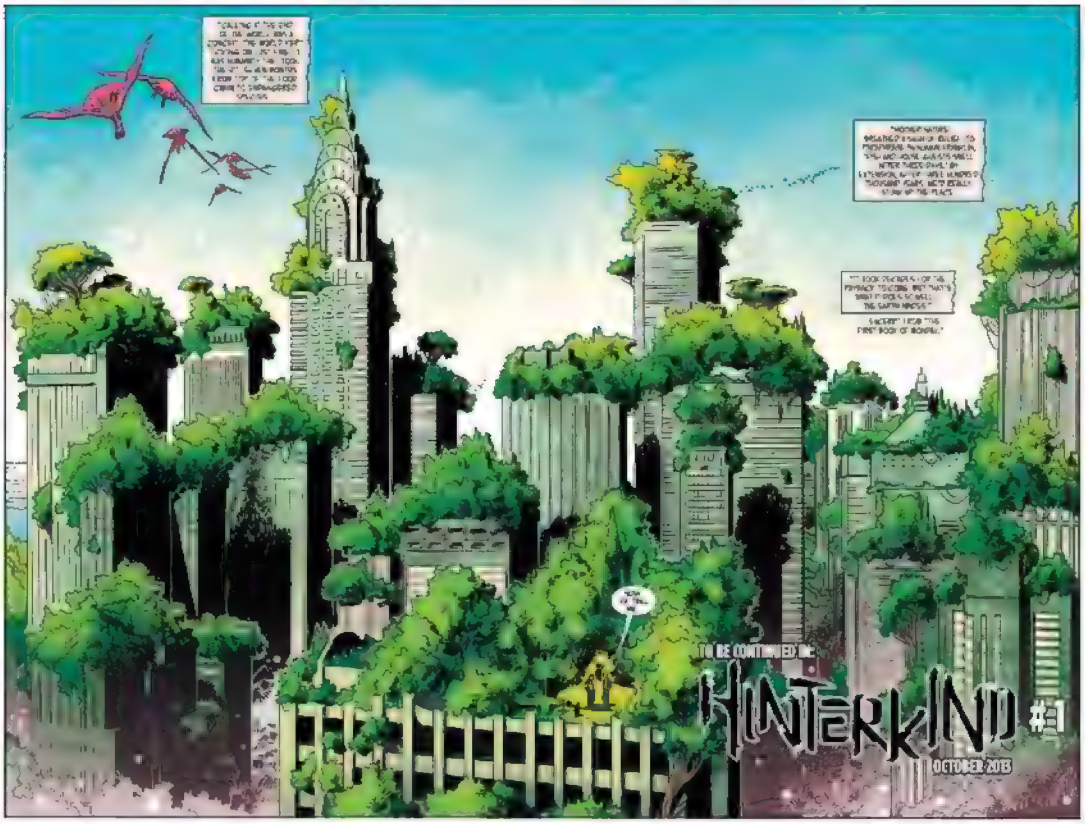
CH: Your work has always been very British and also very satirical. Is this the approach you've taken for *Hinterkind*?
IE: "There are a few wry comments along the way about the way life was before the Blight wiped out most of the human race. Things to do with global commercialism, our addiction to social media and networking. Thousands of people passing each other by, their faces stuck in their phones, unwilling to interact with their neighbour. In the series, some of the older survivors don't so much mourn this as wonder what they did with their lives back then. They (and we) waste so much time on what we think is important but actually isn't. To their children, born after the Blight, it's a complete puzzle. They can't get their heads around some of the things their parents used to do, thinking it was 'normal'. Other than that, *Hinterkind*'s meant to be an intelligent, action/adventure story with a fair few twists along the way."

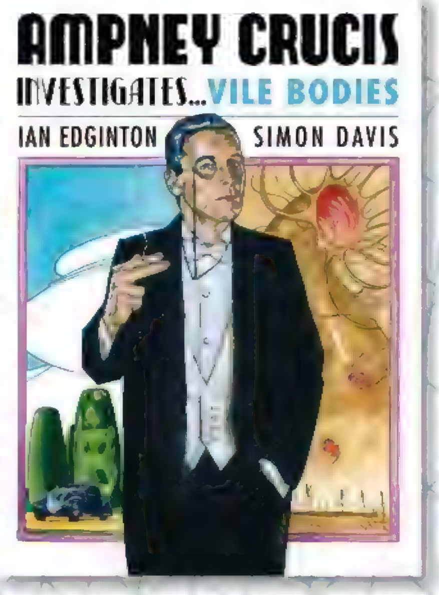


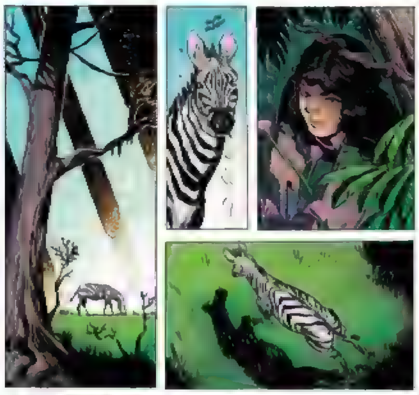
"Various tribes have turned America into a series of fantastic fiefdoms"

CH: Fantasy is a genre you haven't ventured into much…
IE: "It's not fantasy, that's the point. The idea is that all these fantastical creatures actually exist. They're not magical but real, divergent species who we've incorporated into myths and legends to explain the unexplainable."

CH: It looks like quite a dark series. What were your biggest influences when you were constructing the world it's set in?
IE: "I'd have to say the classic myths, legends and fairy stories. On top of all that, it would be


TO BE CONTINUED IN:
HINTERKIND #1
OCTOBER 2013


AMPNEY CRUCIS
INVESTIGATES...VILE BODIES
IAN EDGINTON
SIMON DAVIS



AT THE RISK OF PLAYING THE PETULANT SCHOOLBOY – THEY STARTED IT! GIVEN THE CHANCE, DO YOU IMAGINE THE MARTIANS WOULD'VE PLAYED FAIR?
EXCEPT THEY'RE NOT MARTIANS, ARE THEY? I SAW THE TRACKS... THEY'RE THINGS FROM ANOTHER WORLD. ONE THAT NO LONGER EXISTS!

things like *Dune*, *Lord Of The Rings* or *Game Of Thrones*. The story starts small, with a granddaughter leaving the safety of her village to venture out into the wildwood on a quest to find her lost grandfather. Straight away it makes you think of *Little Red Riding Hood* or *Beauty And The Beast*. However, the village is Central Park, New York and the wildwood is what America has become decades after the Blight devastated Earth.

"From the girl, Prosper's, point-of-view, we get to see a much wider and ever-expanding view of this new world and the creatures that have claimed it for their own. Dominant races like the Sidhe (the fair folk) are building an empire on the west coast, as are the centaur horse-clans in the mid-west. Then there are various tribes of trolls and goblins, ogres and sprites who have all staked their claim to what was America, turning it into a series of fantastic fiefdoms."

CH: It looks like a very different series to Vertigo's existing *Fables* monthly. Is it fair to say that this is a counterpoint to Willingham's tales?

IE: "I suppose you could say that but then again, I don't know. It was never a conscious choice for it to be like that. I certainly never pitched it that way."

CH: Faeries have often been used to signify what is malign and otherworldly in fiction and art, with artists such as Arthur Rackham and Edmund Dulac using them as avatars of nastiness. Does *Hinterkind* follow in this tradition?

IE: "In a way, yes. The faeries – or the Sidhe as they are in *Hinterkind* – are a powerful, politicised people. They have an elaborate and sophisticated culture. They misjudged the human race millennia ago and were driven to near extinction as a result, now fate has smiled on them and humankind is nearly no more, they're taking back what was theirs with a vengeance. A particularly bloody vengeance, it must be said."

CH: How far ahead have you plotted?

IE: "I've got the first two years plotted out and the next two roughed out in some detail. When I started to lay it all out for the initial pitch, more ideas kept on popping up as I was going along, so they've now been fed into the third and fourth years – if we make it that far!"

Above: The revenge of Mother Nature: green and overgrown, it's New York like you've never quite seen it before.

CH: How did the artist Francesco Trifogli come on board and how closely have you worked with him?

IE: "It was simply a case of editor Will Dennis showing me his work and we both agreed he'd be great on the book and that was that, job done! We bounce ideas back and forth, mostly via email. We've not met up yet, so we'll have to arrange something."

CH: How important was it that you had an artist who could bring European sensibilities to the series?

IE: "His realising of a post-apocalyptic, greened-over world is amazing. He's also done a fabulous of job putting flesh on the bones of the Hinterkind themselves, such as multi-armed bridge trolls that function like trapdoor spiders, ensnaring any unwary prey that passes overhead. We've been world-building on a huge scale, giving creatures from fable and myth a new look or twist in order to make them work in the real world." CH

***Hinterkind* #1 is out now, published by Vertigo.**

How to reboot a thief

Andrew Hope

In the early '90s he was one of Mark Millar's first collaborators, but then Hope left comics for the lure of Hollywood. Now Marvel has enticed him back to work on a new series of *Fantomex*.

By Stephen Jewell

Andrew Hope's dramatic return to the comic book industry after a two decade-long absence makes for a pretty compelling story in itself. Recruited by the late Trident Comics editor Martin Skidmore to pencil *Shadowmen* (1990) – one of the first ever series from a then fresh-faced Mark Millar – the Glasgow artist subsequently disappeared from sight.

In reality, he shifted to the United States in the mid-1990s and reinvented himself as a screenwriter. Now, through his relationship with his agent Jon Campbell – the man who sold the rights to Mick Anglo's original *Marvelman* to the House of Ideas in 2009 – he has unexpectedly found himself teaming up with *Deadpool* artist Shawn Crystal on a *Fantomex* four-parter for Marvel's MAX line.

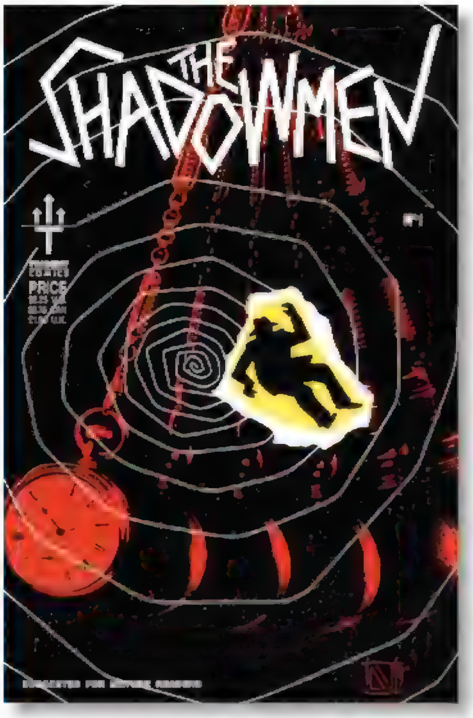
"The history of the project is that there were creative differences between Marvel's editorial and the previous writer of the book and it never moved past that," the Minnesota-based scribe tells *Comic Heroes*. "Jon asked if I'd like to look at it and when I read the story outline, I let it gestate for a day or so and then it suddenly struck me that I knew why it wasn't working. I also knew, given my film background, that I could give Marvel what they were looking for.

"If they wanted to take it any further, that was up to them, but fortunately the top-to-bottom revised plot that I wrote apparently knocked it out the park and it wasn't long before they agreed to go forward."

Comic Heroes: You first met Mark Millar in the late '80s. How did *Shadowmen* come about?

Andrew Hope: "I worked part-time at the legendary AKA Books and Comics shop. If you think of any of the big Glasgow comic creators, such as Gary Erskine, Grant Morrison and Mark Millar, AKA was where everything kind of started for them. I was working weekends behind the till when Mark started coming in and we just ended up chatting. He was pretty shy and retiring back then but I heard that he'd got some work from this new company called Trident. I don't know if he was instrumental in me getting the job, but he was very aware of my artistic abilities. We ended up working together and it was a pretty good collaboration."

BORN GLASGOW
HIGH SHADOWMEN
NOW FANTOMEX
MORE twitter.com/sputnik67



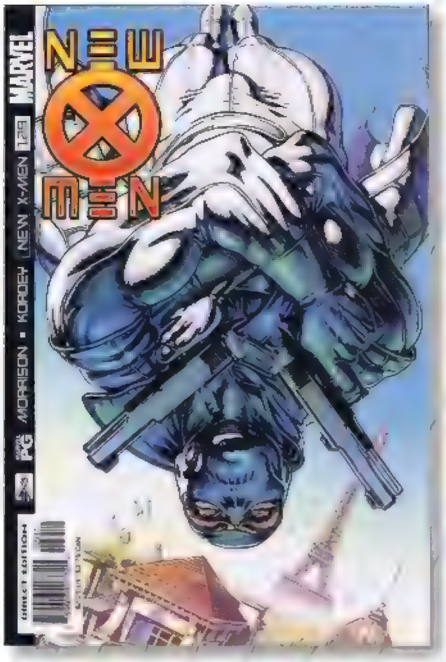
> "I haven't compromised my values as a writer just because it's a MAX book"

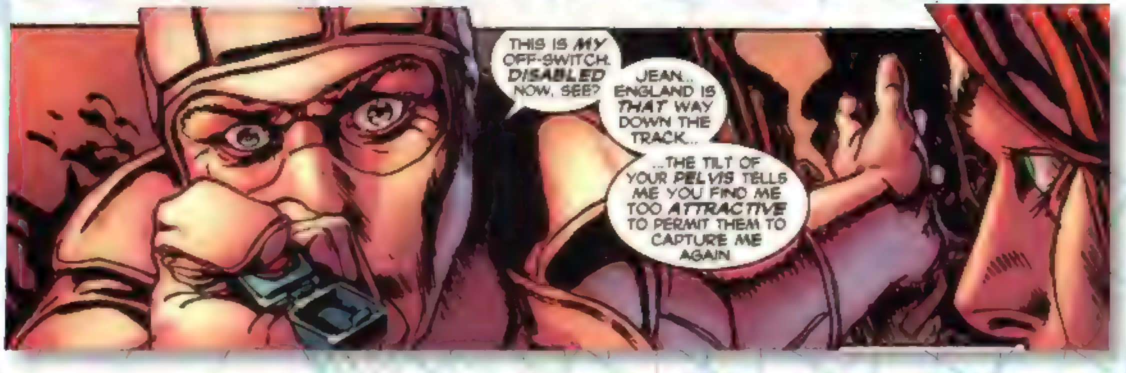
CH: He's certainly gone on to big things… have you kept in touch?

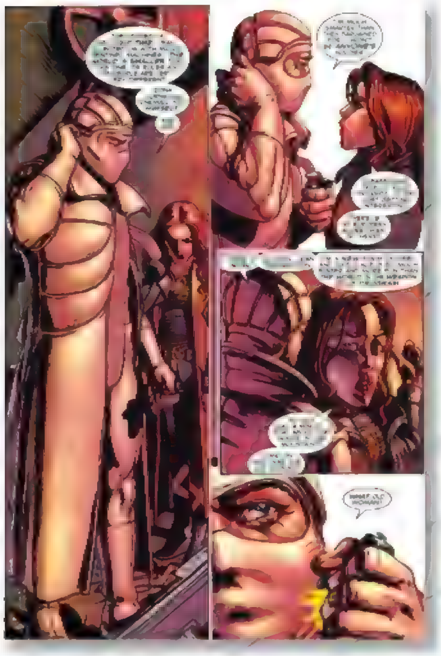
AH: "Living in the US, I lost touch with pretty much everybody. When I first came here, it was pre-internet and long distance phone calls were very expensive. But since Facebook, I've reconnected with everybody, including Mark – although he's so ridiculously busy now so it's just been a few messages here and there. I have to say that I wasn't really a fan of his writing until *Ultimates*, which was completely revelatory for me. The creative partnership between him and Bryan Hitch was absolutely stunning and that's been influential on my take on superheroes."

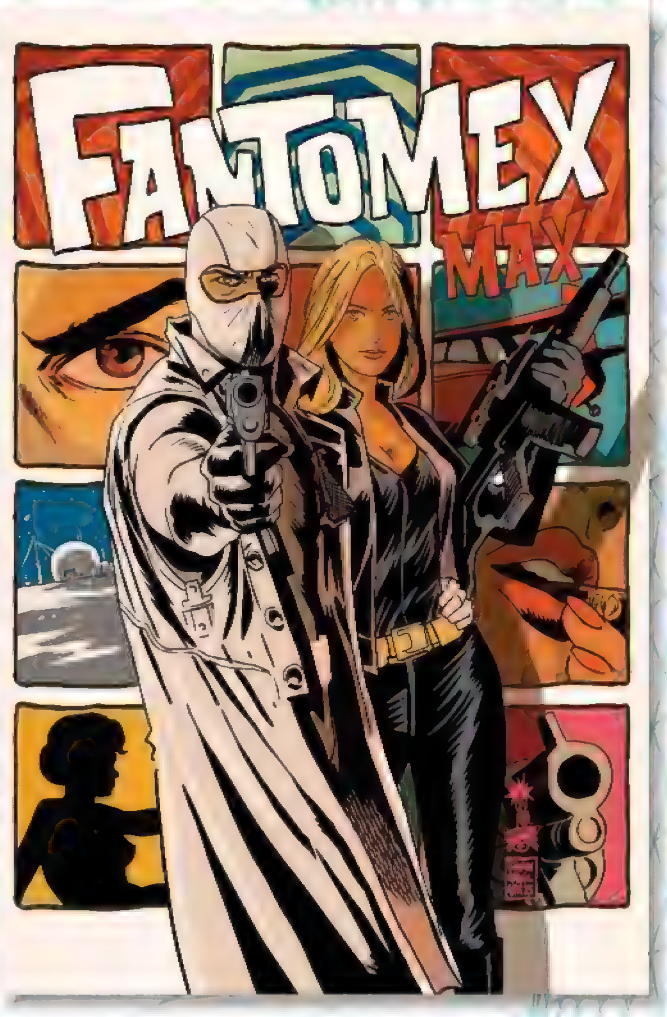
CH: Fantomex first appeared in Grant Morrison's *New X-Men* run back in 2002. *Fantomex MAX* takes place outside regular Marvel continuity so are you alluding to those original stories?

AH: "With most comics, I tend to read them once and, unless it's a really fantastic story, I'll put it away. I remember reading those first issues, where Grant first introduced him, but my mandate from [Marvel editor-in-chief] Axel Alonso as to how much of that I should use was to just take my version and run with it. It's not really connected to very much; although it is thematically linked to those concepts that


MARVEL
NEW X-MEN
MORRISON • KORDEY NEW X-MEN 129
DIRECT EDITION


THIS IS MY OFF-SWITCH. DISABLED NOW, SEE?
JEAN... ENGLAND IS THAT WAY DOWN THE TRACK...
...THE TILT OF YOUR PELVIS TELLS ME YOU FIND ME TOO ATTRACTIVE TO PERMIT THEM TO CAPTURE ME AGAIN

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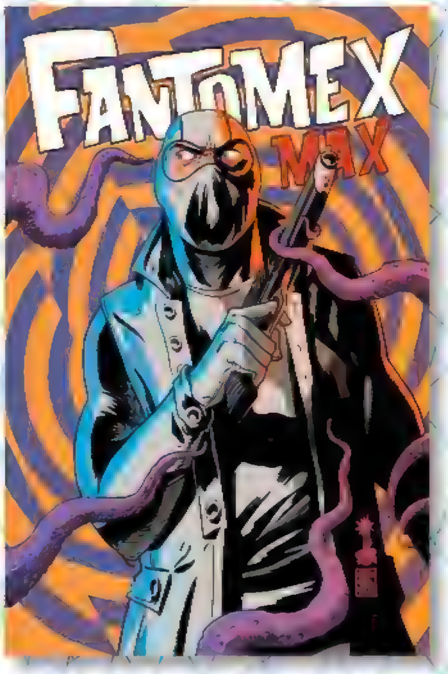

FANTOMEX
MAX

Louis Feuillade's
KINO
FANTÔMAS
The Complete Saga
5 FILMS
3 DVDs

Above: The gun-toting "stealth-fighter" Fantomex, loosely based on Fantômas, Souvestre and Allain's fictional sociopath.
Above left: Fantomex made his Marvel debut in *New X-Men* in 2002.

Grant first created and which other writers, like Rick Remender in *Uncanny X-Force*, have since expanded upon."

CH: The inspiration for Fantomex was classic French master thief Fantômas, created in 1911 by Marcel Allain and Pierre Souvestre. Does your version of the character draw on those European literary roots at all?

AH: "In terms of specific referencing, not that much, although the original story concept that the first writer came up with was heavily influenced by things like *Danger: Diabolik* and it's something that's been in the back of my mind while I've been writing it. It's not a huge influence but there's *Diabolik* DNA in there for sure."

CH: As you hail from this side of the Atlantic, have you also played up Fantomex's Gallic qualities?

AH: "My take on the character is that he's definitely European but he's not specifically identified as French. There are certainly references to that secret side of him that people can interpret as they like. He's a very cultural, intelligent and cunning character and my ultimate goal to writing him is that there's a great air of mystery about him."

CH: The series is published under Marvel's mature readers imprint. Has that given you more creative freedom?

AH: "There's a misconception about being a MAX book – or a Vertigo title – that there's an increased emphasis on the sex and violence because that's what sells. I just don't see it like that. I see those imprints as a means to explore mature themes as well as adult-driven situations. I'm more into adult themes than I am emphasising blood and guts and sex and swearing. I like to feel that I haven't compromised my values as a writer just because it's a MAX book."

CH: If *Fantomex* is successful, do you hope to return for a sequel?

AH: "When I started on this project it was like, 'Okay, I've got a Marvel gig. That's really cool!' But then when I started to write it, I really became entranced with the character. There are some things I'd like to do with this version of *Fantomex* as I feel like I've hit a vein of material that never really existed before. I exploited that as much as I could, given the constraints of this particular story, but I'd like to get more into his head and there are a lot of things that I'd like to start exploring with him. Certainly there are a lot of hints in the series about what could possibly happen to him next and where he originally came from. But you never want to give the reader everything and it's good to have these subplots and ideas that can be expanded into something else later on." **CH**

***Fantomex MAX* goes on sale in October.**

Doctor's orders

Tony Lee

The busiest man in comics is getting to write about three of his favourite childhood television shows – *Doctor Who*, *Battlestar Galactica* and *MacGyver*...

By Stephen Jewell

As with Paul Cornell and his *Doctor Who Special 2013*, Tony Lee didn't initially realise that he would be writing the concluding contribution to IDW's *Doctor Who* line when he agreed to return for a four-issue run. But with the San Diego indie's US comic book licence expiring at the end of the year, the Wild West-set "Dead Man's Hand" has taken on a special poignancy.

If the Hayes-born author *has* written his final adventure for the Time Lord, though, he has plenty more intriguing projects still to come. Debuting in November from Dynamite Entertainment, the four-part *Battlestar Galactica: Starbuck* will take him back to another of his childhood favourites.

Meanwhile, the trade paperback collection of both *The Gloom*, his creator-owned MTV series with old friend Dan Boultwood, and his recent *MacGyver: Fugitive Gauntlet* Image mini – with original TV show creator Lee David Zlotoff and *Fearless Defenders* artist Will Sliney – has just hit the shelves.

Comic Heroes: You got to write IDW's last ever *Doctor Who* issue. No pressure then?

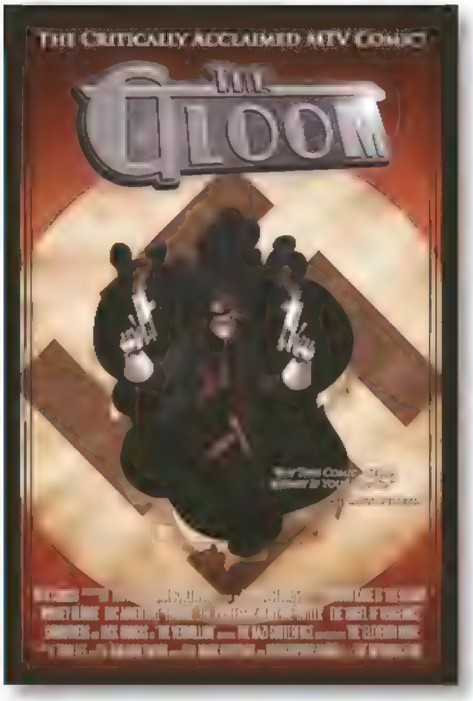
Tony Lee: "My story was originally meant to just end the latest season, finishing off Andy Diggle's 12-issue run in the same way that Josh Fialkov finished my 12 issues in the last season. The plan was then for someone else to start a new season with a new number one. So when I pitched it, I was merely writing an end of series tale – something fun and exciting that would end with a bang. The fact that the third issue would be released in the 50th anniversary month was simply a bonus."

CH: Have you made many changes to your original script to bring the series to more of a conclusion?

TL: "After the news broke that IDW and the BBC would be ending their relationship, I suddenly realised that I'd subconsciously created a situation that linked straight back to my earliest *Doctor Who* stories. After speaking to IDW's *Doctor Who* editor Denton Tipton and the BBC, we significantly ramped the story up, altering dialogue in the earliest issues and bringing in some familiar situations and characters. I'm happier with it now as the chances are that it'll be my last ever *Doctor Who* story and it was nice – as I did with the Tenth Doctor series – to link my final story with one of my earlier ones."

BORN HAYES, MIDDLESEX
HIGH HOPE FALLS/DOCTOR WHO
NOW BATTLESTAR GALACTICA: STARBUCK
MORE www.tonylee.co.uk

> **"The Tenth Doctor was gobby, plain and simple. Even in a fight to the death, Ten would talk"**

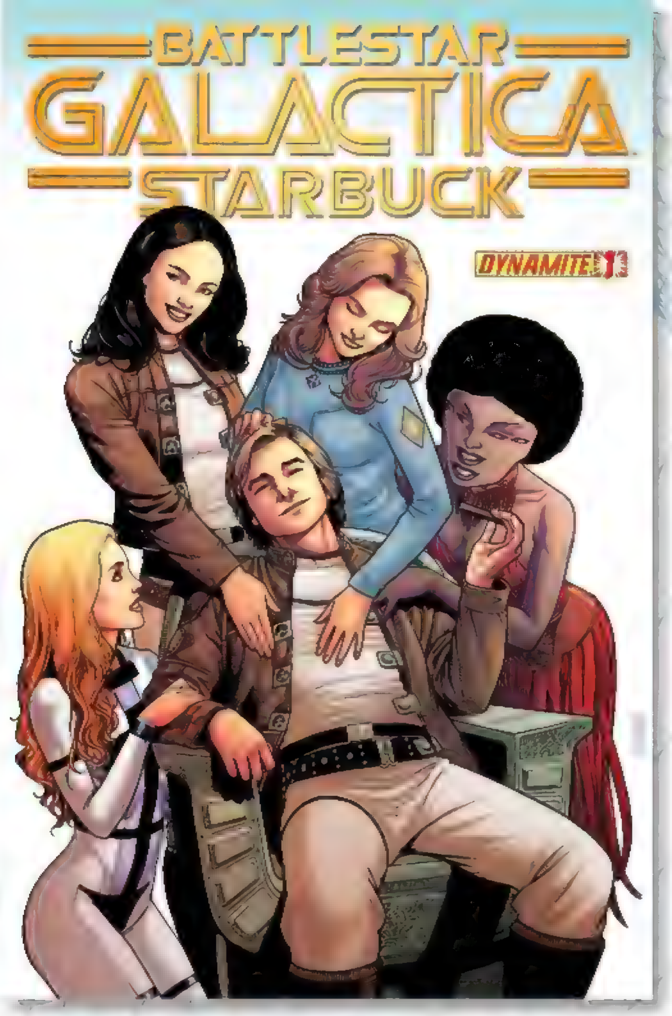

THE CRITICALLY ACCLAIMED MTV COMIC
THE GLOOM

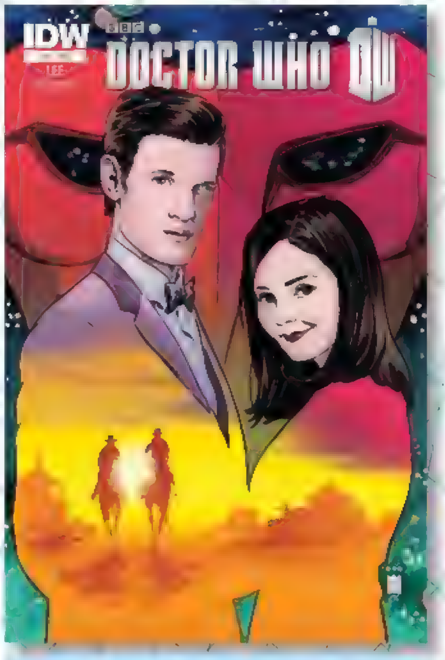
CH: You've written both David Tennant and Matt Smith's Doctors in your time. How do they compare?

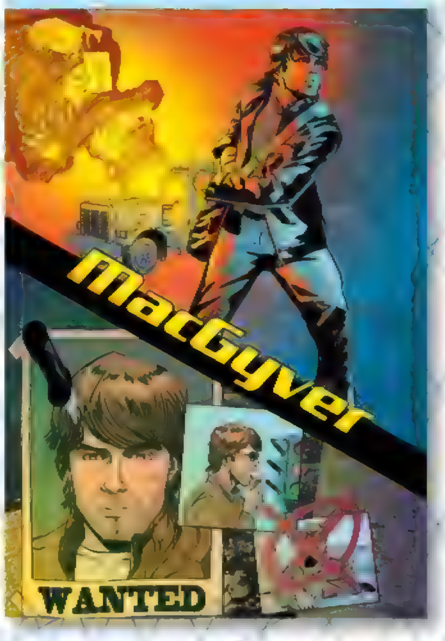
TL: "The Tenth Doctor was gobby, plain and simple. Why spend a balloon talking when you could have three interlinked ones for the same answer? Even in a fight to the death, Ten would talk. Eleven started off more refined, more mature in his speech, an elderly professor in a young man's body but, as Matt has altered the character, the dialogue has also changed. He's far more eccentric and easily distracted than he was before, which makes the dialogue an absolute joy to play with."

CH: With *Battlestar Galactica: Starbuck*, was it a deliberate decision to concentrate on the original male incarnation rather than the later series's female version?

TL: "That was a suggestion Dynamite brought to the table but I'm a massive fan of the Dirk Benedict Starbuck, who has always been an enigma. With only one season before the original series was cancelled, we never learned that much about him, apart from that he became a feral orphan as a child thanks to a Cylon raid on the farming colony of Umbra. We







don't know how he met Apollo or how he became a Colonial Warrior."

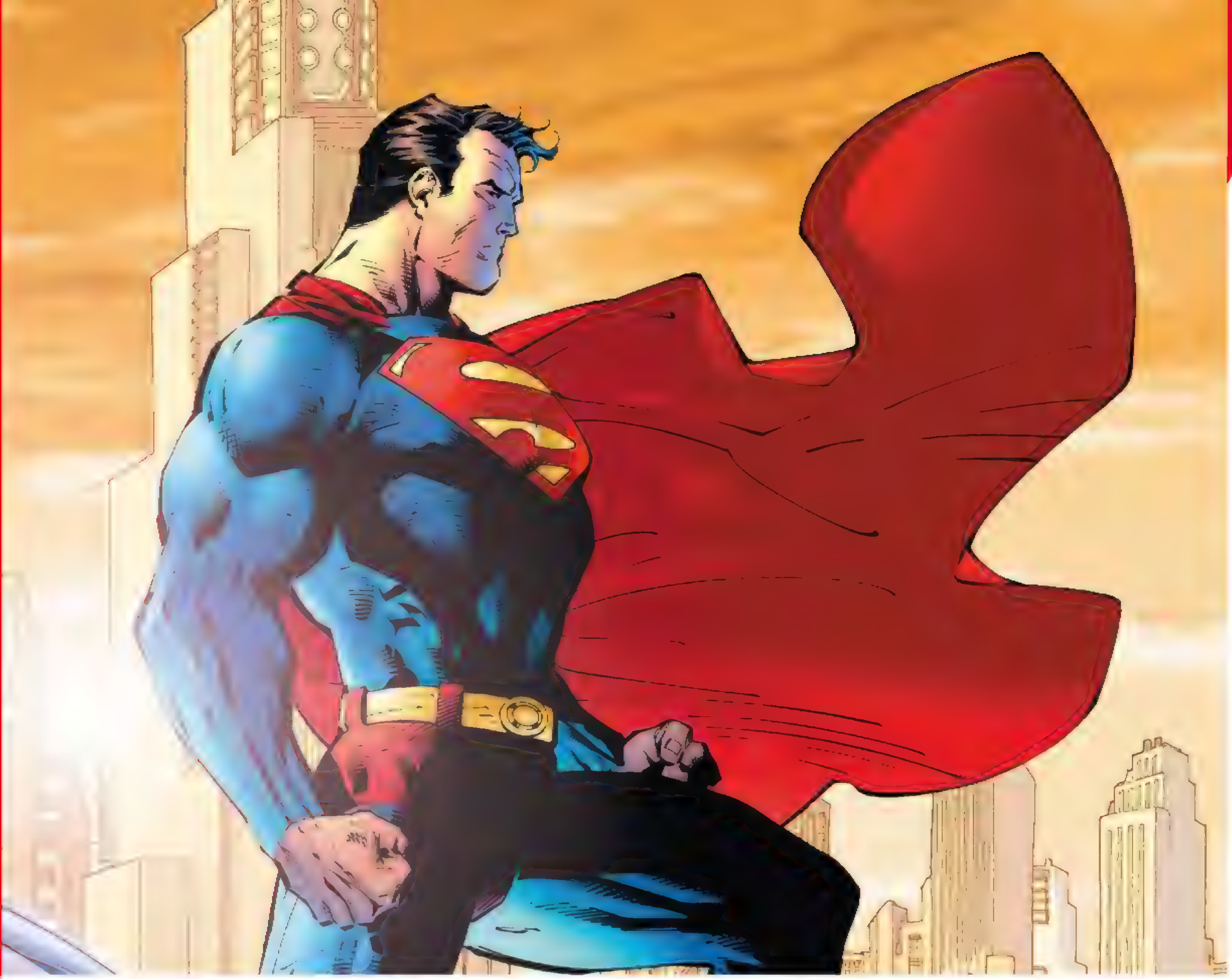
CH: You've described the series as a "Year One"-style origin story for both Starbuck and Apollo...
TL: "It starts with Apollo at the age of five and progresses right up to a story set two years before the events of the first *Battlestar Galactica* episode. So we know how the toys end up in that box, but we get to add things to them this time, such as who was it that got Starbuck gambling and smoking cigars? We also have Apollo's younger brother Zac in it, which is nice, as he dies about 10 minutes into the first episode of the TV show."

CH: How was it working on *MacGyver* with Lee David Zlotoff himself?
TL: "Over the years, MacGyver was one of my go-to answers when asked at conventions, 'What character would you really like to write,' but something that I never expected to achieve. Then I decided that I had nothing to lose by checking into it so I asked my manager to find out who had the rights. Within a week, she phoned saying, 'It's Lee David Zlotoff – he's interested and you have a meeting with him next Wednesday.' I was a little unnerved but Lee turned out to be a great fan of the comic style and was on board from the start."

Above: A fanboy's dream: Lee has been lucky enough to revisit three TV titans of his youth in comic-book form.

CH: After penning so many licensed titles, is it a refreshing change to work on your own properties?
TL: "Creator-owned stories don't really make you a ton of money unless they're something that gains a massive public interest. *The Gloom* never did anything when Markosia originally released it and it was only when we completely re-wrote and re-drew it for MTV that it started to gain some interest. So to decide to do something completely unpaid was always going to be a bit of a coin toss. That said, Dan is one of my oldest comic friends and creative partners and I'd do something with him again in a heartbeat. He's currently busy with *It Came!* for Titan but we've recently talked about revisiting *Shieldmaiden*, a story we pitched a couple of years ago, so who knows?" CH

IDW continues to publish *Doctor Who* until Christmas. *Battlestar Galactica: Starbuck* is out in November and *The Gloom* graphic novel is available now.



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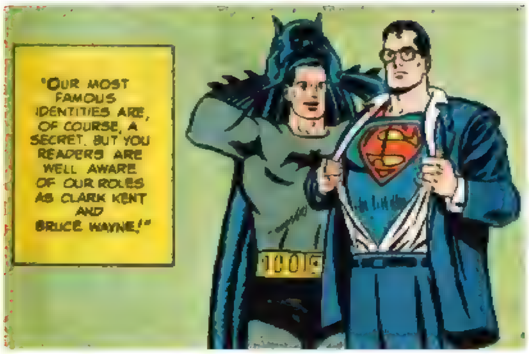
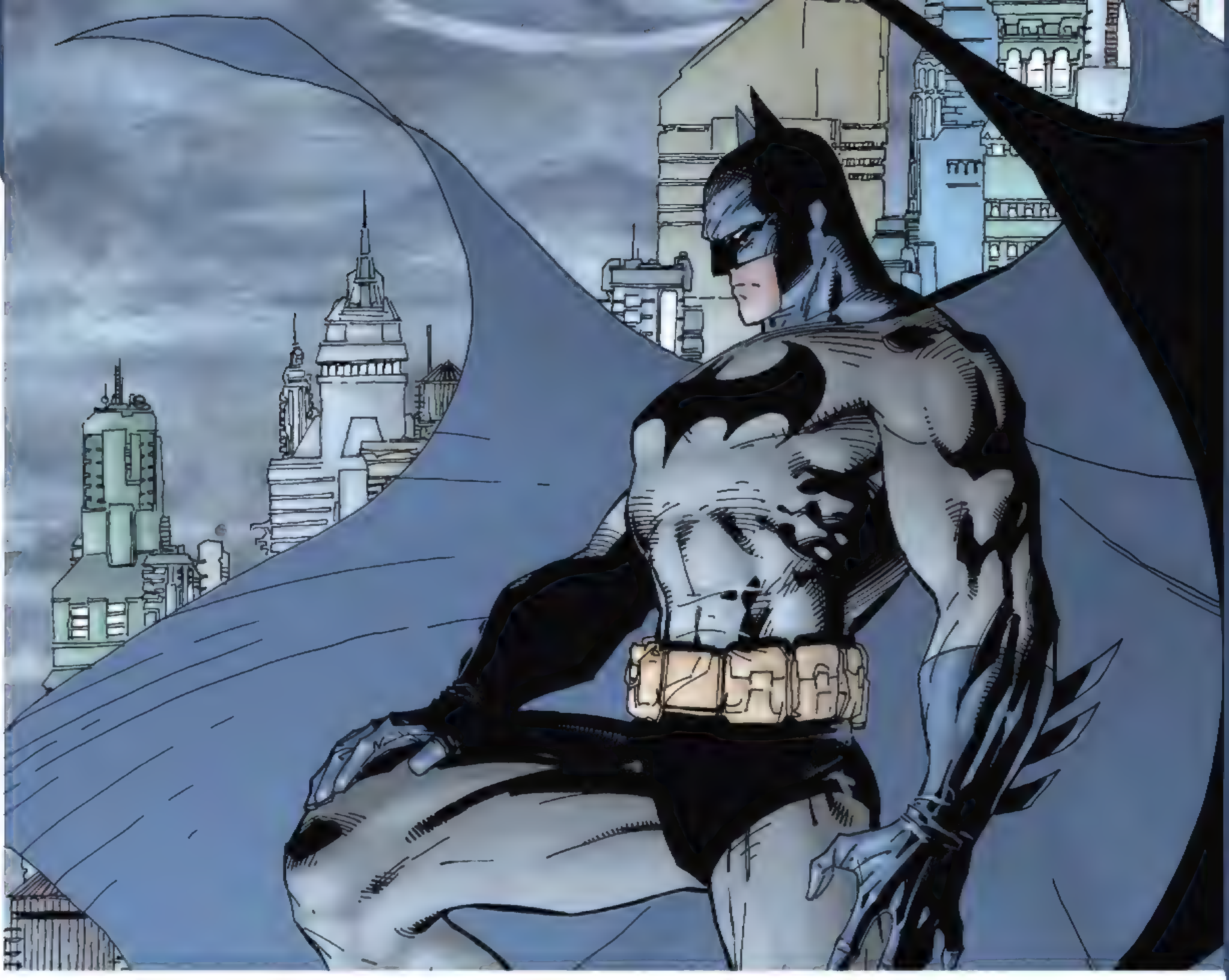
SUPERMAN &

THE REAL DYNAMIC DUO


"OUR MOST FAMOUS IDENTITIES ARE, OF COURSE, A SECRET. BUT YOU READERS ARE WELL AWARE OF OUR ROLES AS CLARK KENT AND BRUCE WAYNE!"

On their first appearance together they were dubbed "The Mightiest Team On Earth!" and little's changed since. Batman and Superman may not always rub along – but when the chips are down, who else would you want in your corner? **By Matt Bielby**



& BATMAN

When you think about the Marvel Universe, you think Spider-Man and the X-Men, sure – but Iron Man and Hulk and Thor and Captain America and the Fantastic Four and all the rest too. DC has older properties (Wonder Woman, born in 1942; Green Lantern, from 1940; the Flash, who debuted the same year), but beyond that the list of marquee names tails off. Not that it matters too much, of course; not when they have the two most important of them all.

Superman and Batman aren't just household names, but the foundations upon which an entire genre – and, indeed, the whole comic book industry – has been built. They're light versus dark, optimism contrasted with obsession, power unlimited against the need to make the very most of what you've got. And when the pair of them come together, it's the most compelling, most uneasy, most dynamic alliance in the comics.

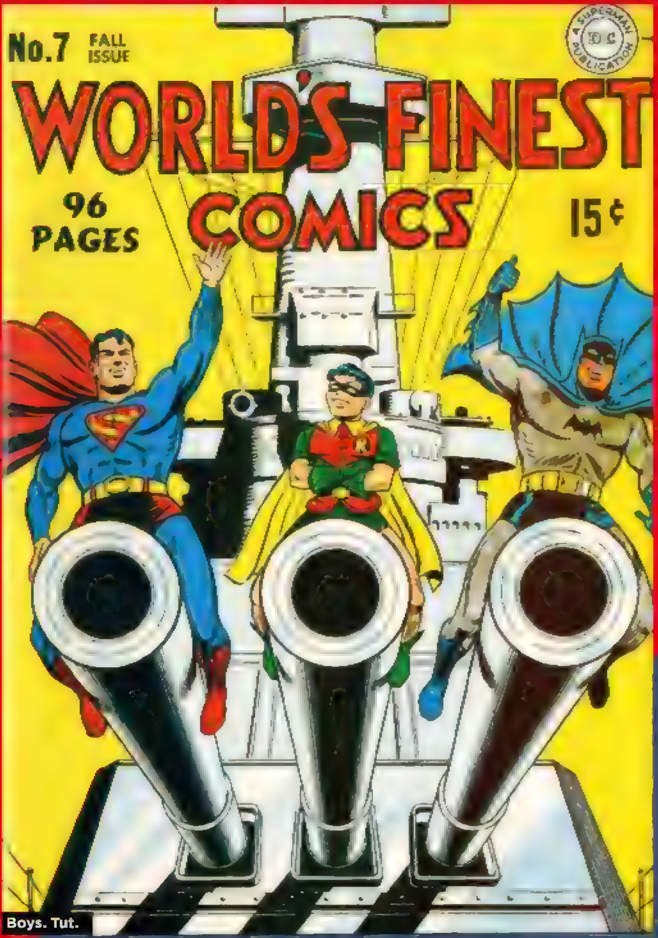
Superman was first created by two young Cleveland residents, Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster, while at high school, but only appeared in print a number of years later, when National Allied Publishing (precursor to DC) was casting around for a lead feature for its new *Action Comics* title. Against the odds, Siegel and Shuster's much-rejected creation finally got his chance – and ran (or perhaps flew) with it. It was 1938, and *Superman* was an immediate hit, earning a second, self-named title the following year.

And then, of course, within the next 12 months we'd seen the debut of his biggest friend and rival, Batman, too. Millionaire playboy Bruce Wayne's dark, vengeful alter-ego first appeared in *Detective Comics* #27, a grim, street-level crime-buster with no special powers but a dramatic costume and striking deductive skills. He, too, quickly caught the public imagination, and by 1940 also had his own dedicated title, *Batman*, to run alongside *Detective*. The modern superhero was born.

> **"They're the foundations upon which an entire genre has been built"**

"TOGETHER, IN ONE ADVENTURE!"

As with all the other superheroes, Batman had, of course, been part-inspired by the »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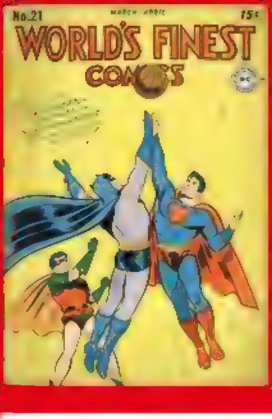
FALL ISSUE
A SUPERMAN DC PUBLICATION
WORLD'S FINEST
96 PAGES
COMICS
15¢

Boys. Tut.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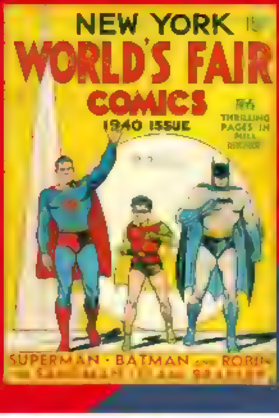
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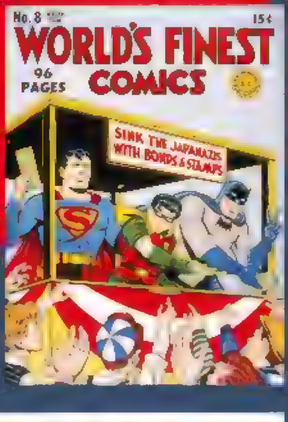
SUPERMAN · BATMAN AND ROBIN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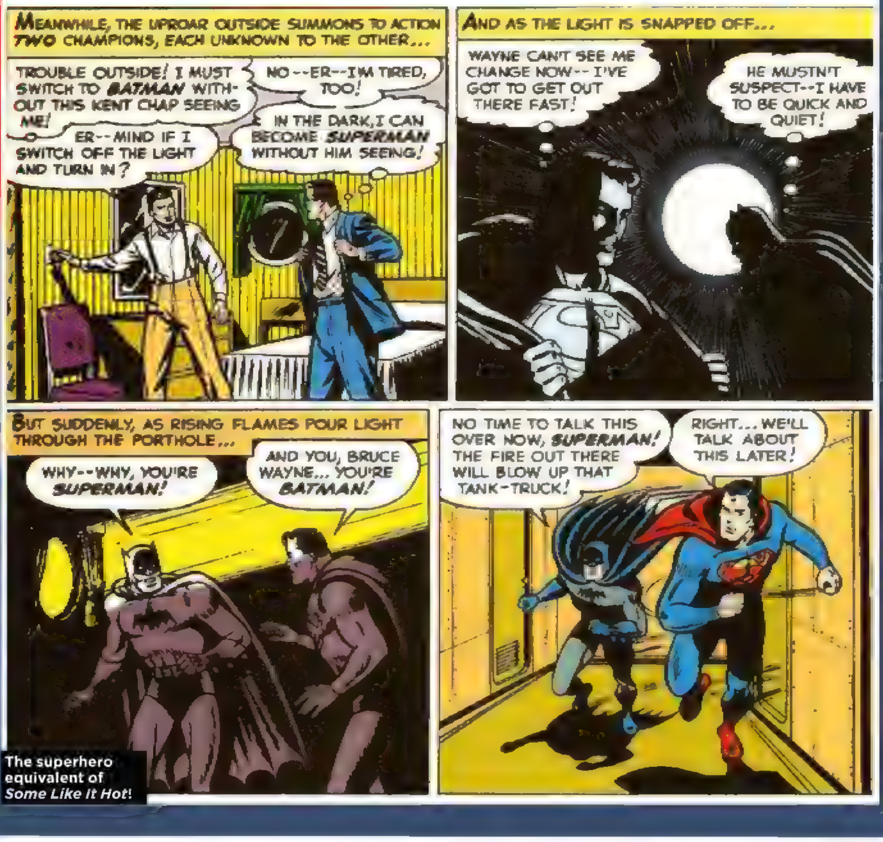
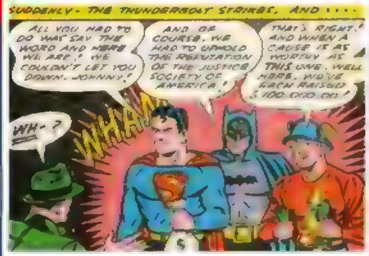
SINK THE JAPANAZIS WITH BONDS & STAMPS


MEANWHILE, THE UPROAR OUTSIDE SUMMONS TO ACTION TWO CHAMPIONS, EACH UNKNOWN TO THE OTHER...
TROUBLE OUTSIDE! I MUST SWITCH TO BATMAN WITHOUT THIS KENT CHAP SEEING ME!
NO--ER--I'M TIRED, TOO!
ER--MIND IF I SWITCH OFF THE LIGHT AND TURN IN?
IN THE DARK, I CAN BECOME SUPERMAN WITHOUT HIM SEEING!
AND AS THE LIGHT IS SNAPPED OFF...
WAYNE CAN'T SEE ME CHANGE NOW-- I'VE GOT TO GET OUT THERE FAST!
HE MUSTN'T SUSPECT--I HAVE TO BE QUICK AND QUIET!
BUT SUDDENLY, AS RISING FLAMES POUR LIGHT THROUGH THE PORTHOLE...
WHY--WHY, YOU'RE SUPERMAN!
AND YOU, BRUCE WAYNE... YOU'RE BATMAN!
NO TIME TO TALK THIS OVER NOW, SUPERMAN! THE FIRE OUT THERE WILL BLOW UP THAT TANK-TRUCK!
RIGHT... WE'LL TALK ABOUT THIS LATER!

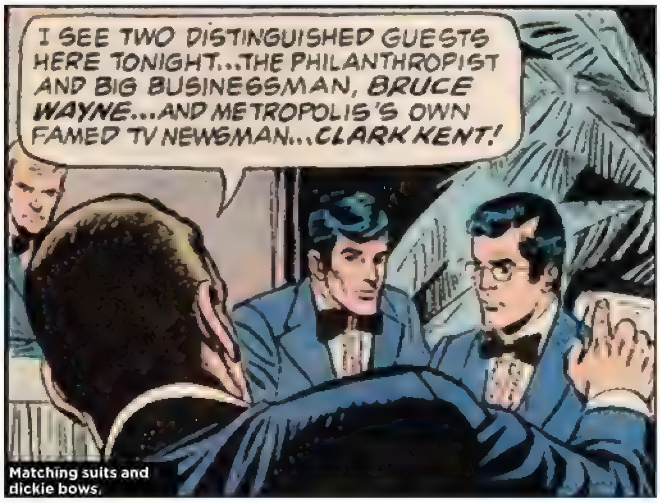
The superhero equivalent of *Some Like It Hot!*


SUDDENLY - THE THUNDERBOLT STRIKES, AND ....
ALL YOU HAD TO DO WAS SAY THE WORD AND HERE WE ARE! WE COULDN'T LET YOU DOWN, JOHNNY!
AND OF COURSE, WE HAD TO UPHOLD THE REPUTATION OF THE JUSTICE SOCIETY OF AMERICA!
THAT'S RIGHT! AND WHEN A CAUSE IS AS WORTHY AS THIS ONE, WELL HERE, WE'VE EACH RAISED $100,000.00!
WH-?
WHAM

SUPERMAN
The DYNAMIC DUO & KANDOR

success of Superman the previous year – but he had other things going for him too: a distinctive silhouette, for one, and a very different mood, influenced by crime stories and the pulps.

Visually, he was a grab-bag of bits and pieces from films *The Bat-Whisperers* and *The Mark Of Zorro*, Bela Lugosi's *Dracula* and the flying machine sketches of Leonardo da Vinci. Put into a metaphorical blender, this lot led artist Bob Kane and writer Bill Finger towards a moody grey-and-black costume design with sharp horns, pupil-less white eyes and a scallop-edged cape; there would soon be pointed blades on Batman's gloves too.


I SEE TWO DISTINGUISHED GUESTS HERE TONIGHT...THE PHILANTHROPIST AND BIG BUSINESSMAN, BRUCE WAYNE...AND METROPOLIS'S OWN FAMED TV NEWSMAN...CLARK KENT!

Matching suits and dickie bows.

Indeed, there were sharp, pointy triangles everywhere on this guy, and that soon extended to his car, his plane, his throwing weapons – in silhouette, only Superman's stance would distinguish him from most other superheroes, but this guy was unmistakable however you drew him. In time, both strips would learn from each other – *Batman* would lend *Superman* the idea of powerful iconography, while *Superman* would give *Batman* the model for an extended family of linked characters. But for the first few years the two heroes were different beasts indeed.

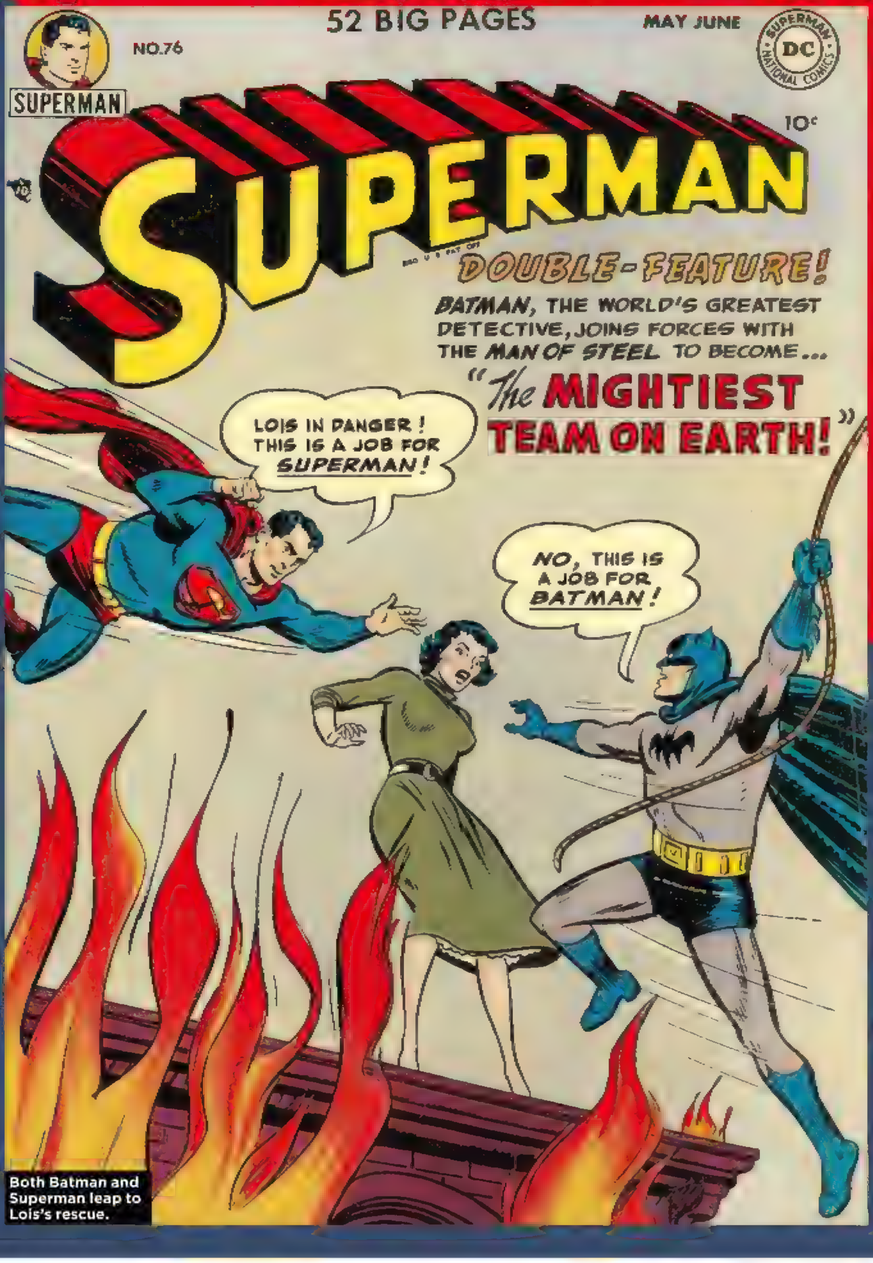
And the world in which they existed was very different to what we know now too. Back in the early '40s, comic books were generally fat, cheapish anthologies. Inside each book, the different heroes would occupy their own distinct little worlds, and crossovers between any two of them were virtually unheard of – the modern team-up was decades hence.

Indeed, so rare were team-ups that – apart from on numerous covers and the odd single-panel cameo inside, as in *All-Star Comics* #7, published in late 1941 – Superman and Batman wouldn't actually cross paths for years. Not until *Superman* #76 (May-June 1952), in fact, the pair having at this point been household names for approaching 15 years.

"THE CONTEST OF HEROES!"

By modern standards this is ridiculous, of course. But crossovers simply weren't part of a creator's regular tool bag at the time. The earliest versions of the pair had occupied such different spaces – Superman's smiling and brightly coloured; Batman's introverted and spooky – that it had been hard to see how they'd slot together at all. And anyway, surely their powers were of such different magnitudes as to make a team-up laughable? Wouldn't the Dark Knight find himself more or less redundant if the two were ever paired?

Not so, as it turned out. But the first proof of this didn't come from the comics. Batman and Robin (a 1940 addition) actually met Superman on the radio long before they encountered each other on the page. The Dynamic Duo guest-starred repeatedly on the smash hit *The Adventures Of Superman* radio show that had been turning the Man of Steel into a household name since the dawn


NO.76
SUPERMAN
52 BIG PAGES
MAY JUNE
10¢
SUPERMAN
DOUBLE-FEATURE!
BATMAN, THE WORLD'S GREATEST DETECTIVE, JOINS FORCES WITH THE MAN OF STEEL TO BECOME...
"The MIGHTIEST TEAM ON EARTH!"
LOIS IN DANGER! THIS IS A JOB FOR SUPERMAN!
NO, THIS IS A JOB FOR BATMAN!

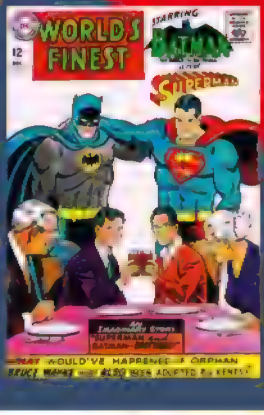
Both Batman and Superman leap to Lois's rescue.

WORLD'S FINEST COMICS
AMERICA'S GREATEST ADVENTURE MAGAZINE

WORLD'S FINEST

WORLD'S FINEST COMICS
96 THRILLING PAGES!
SUPERMAN BATMAN AND ROBIN
ZATARA SANDMAN RED WHITE & BLUE

76 BIG PAGES
WORLD'S FINEST COMICS
A BRAND NEW HERO
Tom Sparks, BOY INVENTOR!


WORLD'S FINEST
STARRING BATMAN SUPERMAN

of the '40s, and though Bruce and Dick came late to the party – first cropping up in 1945 – they made quite the impact, at times dominating events as Superman disappeared, perhaps captured or weakened by green Kryptonite or simply otherwise engaged. (Actually, what was really happening was that Superman actor Bud Collyer needed a holiday occasionally, and these two made for acceptable stand-ins.)

Part novelty, part temporary replacement lead, and part try-out for a possible Caped Crusader radio show (which never happened), Batman's appearances here showed one effective approach to teaming two such different heroes – let them spend as little time together as possible.

Though meetings between any two superheroes were rare at first, in time they did start to happen – most notably in 1940, when the first real superteam was established in the pages of National's *All-Star Comics*. The Justice Society of America, as they were known, was another immediate sensation.

Not that their adventures would do much for audiences today. Superman and Batman (and soon even the Flash and Green Lantern, heroes on the next rung down) were sidelined, defined as honorary JSA members only, leaving the coast clear for the series to push the lesser-known likes of Hawkman, Doctor Fate and the Spectre. Initially, the good guys would meet at the beginning and the end of each issue only, while each hero's own creative team would tell a solo story in the middle explaining how their particular good guy battled an aspect of some larger overall menace.

Later, thinner issues would force more interactive storylines, but it couldn't last long; times were hard, and *All-Star* (and, with it, the JSA) disappeared in 1951, the book transformed into a Western title. The permanent superhero team-up had been just one more victim of the entire genre's sudden decline, and the line-wide DC cull that followed.

But years later, when the concept returned in 1960 – now called Justice League of America and built around all of DC's biggest guns – it did include Wonder Woman, Green Lantern and the Flash, while Superman and Batman took centre stage. And ever since, through name changes and line-up shifts, DC's premier superteam has spun around the core alliance (and philosophical conflict) at its heart: the relationship between Bruce Wayne and Clark Kent. (Even when one or both has been missing from the roster – as in the mid-'80s light comedy reworking of the team by Keith Giffen and others – the shadow of those absent has loomed large.)

> **" For the first few years the two heroes were different beasts indeed "**

But the Justice League is another story, and by the time it appeared, Batman and Superman had already enjoyed a long history fighting side by side.

WORLD'S FINEST

"BATTLE OF THE SUPER-HEROES!"

It was with the collapse of *All-Star Comics* in the early '50s – where the two heroes could have conceivably turned up every issue, but in actual fact almost never did – that DC decided the time was right to do the obvious thing and put its marquee names together, initially in sporadic toe-in-the-water fashion, but eventually as a permanent fixture.

Superman #76 came out the year after *All-Star* ended, spotlighting an Edmond Hamilton/Curt Swan tale called "The

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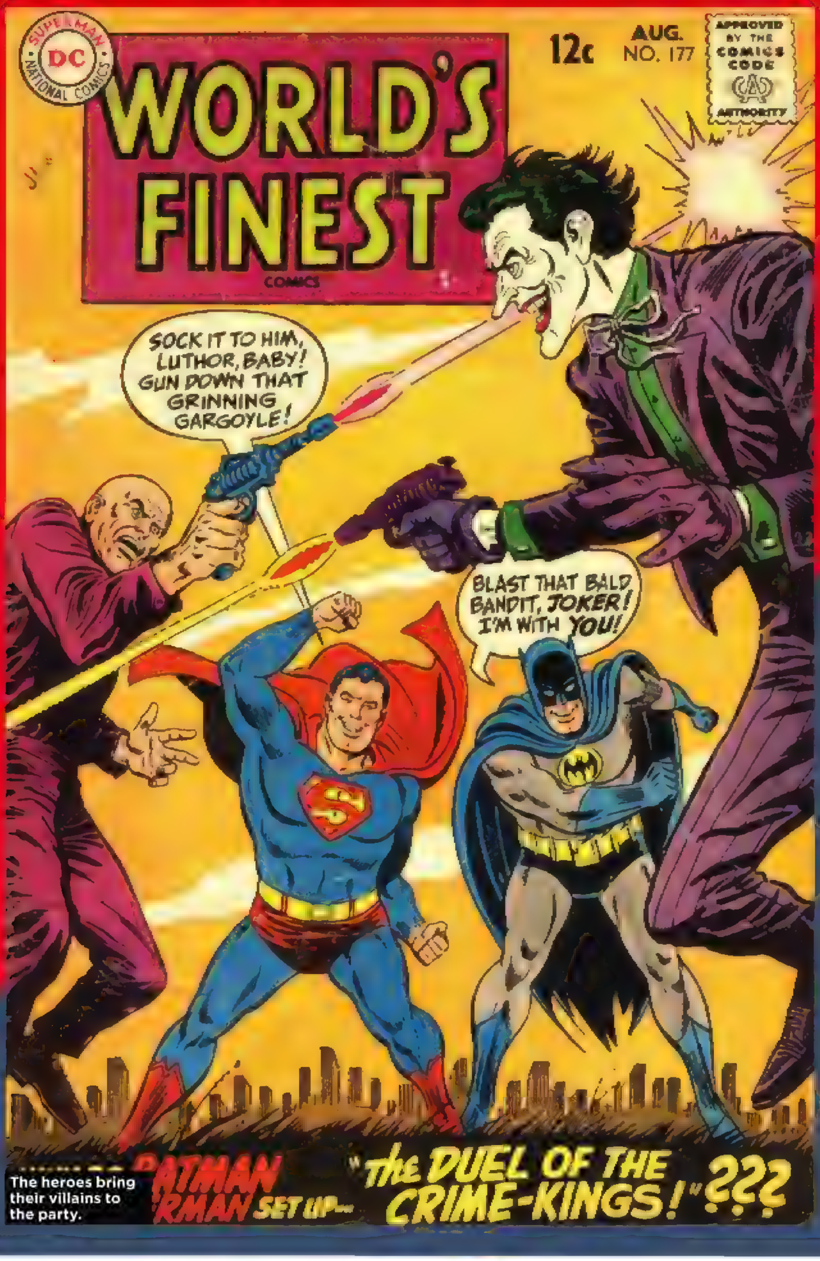
WORLD'S FINEST COMICS
12¢
AUG. NO. 177
APPROVED BY THE COMICS CODE AUTHORITY
SOCK IT TO HIM, LUTHOR, BABY! GUN DOWN THAT GRINNING GARGOYLE!
BLAST THAT BALD BANDIT, JOKER! I'M WITH YOU!
BATMAN
RMAN SET UP...
"THE DUEL OF THE CRIME-KINGS!"???

The heroes bring their villains to the party.

80 PAGE GIANT
SUPERMAN
BATMAN
ROBIN
CONTEST of HEROES

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"The MIRROR BATMAN!"

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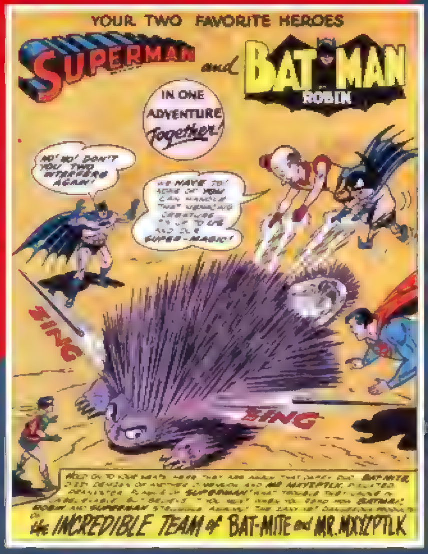
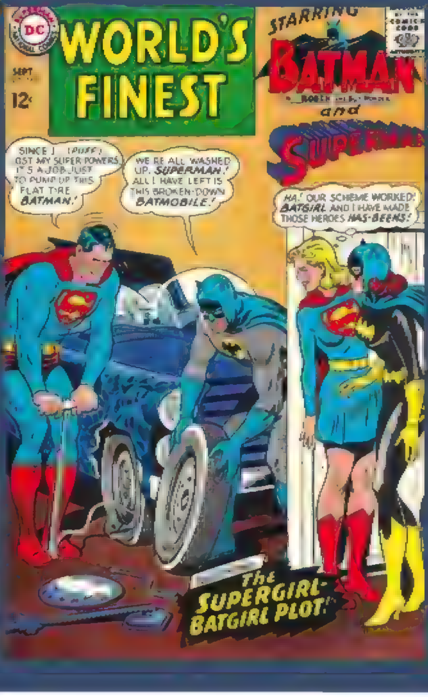
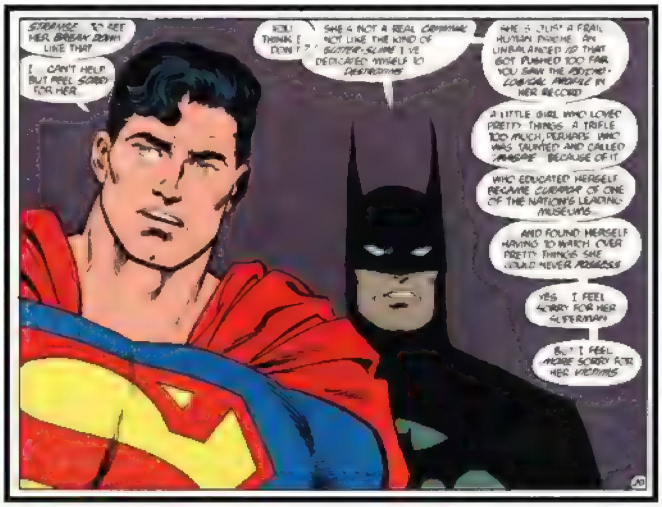
TWICE THE ACTION! TWICE THE THRILLS!


YOUR TWO FAVORITE HEROES
SUPERMAN and BATMAN ROBIN
IN ONE ADVENTURE Together!
NO! NO! DON'T YOU TWO INTERFERE AGAIN!
ZING
ZING
the INCREDIBLE TEAM of BAT-MITE and MR. MXYZPTLK


DC
WORLD'S FINEST
SEPT
12¢
STARRING BATMAN and SUPERMAN
SINCE I... (PUFF) LOST MY SUPER POWERS IT'S A JOB JUST TO PUMP UP THIS FLAT TIRE, BATMAN!
WE'RE ALL WASHED UP, SUPERMAN! ALL I HAVE LEFT IS THIS BROKEN-DOWN BATMOBILE!
HA! OUR SCHEME WORKED! BATGIRL AND I HAVE MADE THOSE HEROES HAS-BEENS!
The SUPERGIRL-BATGIRL PLOT!

Mightiest Team on Earth!" On the cover we saw Lois Lane caught in a fire. Inside, on a light-hearted ocean cruise, we see Bruce Wayne and Clark Kent forced to share a cabin, both quickly sussing out the other's secret; misunderstandings and confusion ensue.

The tale basically worked as an early dry-run for the new, shorter, cheaper incarnation of *World's Finest Comics* that began in 1954 – and now a combination of space constraints and pragmatism combined the Batman and Superman stories into a single feature for the first time. The original writer assigned the job – Alvin Schwartz, who'd penned the first Bizarro story – described it as like "mixing ice cream and mustard" and soon quit; Edmond Hamilton was happy to take over.


STRANGE... TO SEE HER BREAK DOWN LIKE THAT
I... CAN'T HELP BUT FEEL SORRY FOR HER
YOU THINK I DON'T?
SHE'S NOT A REAL CRIMINAL NOT LIKE THE KIND OF GUTTER-SLIME I'VE DEDICATED MYSELF TO DESTROYING
SHE IS JUST A FRAIL HUMAN PSYCHE. AN UNBALANCED ID THAT GOT PUSHED TOO FAR. YOU SAW THE PSYCHOLOGICAL PROFILE IN HER RECORD
A LITTLE GIRL WHO LOVED PRETTY THINGS. A TRIFLE TOO MUCH, PERHAPS. WHO WAS TAUNTED AND CALLED MAGPIE BECAUSE OF IT
WHO EDUCATED HERSELF, BECAME CURATOR OF ONE OF THE NATION'S LEADING MUSEUMS...
AND FOUND HERSELF HAVING TO WATCH OVER PRETTY THINGS SHE COULD NEVER POSSESS
YES... I FEEL SORRY FOR HER, SUPERMAN
BUT I FEEL MORE SORRY FOR HER VICTIMS

World's Finest had originally begun in 1941 as a fat quarterly featuring a variety of strips, some superhero, some not.

Red, White and Blue were three young soldier buddies, and Hop Harrigan a daredevil pilot – but Zatara the magician was here also, and Johnny Thunder with his Thunderbolt. And shoulder-to-shoulder on the covers of many issues: Batman and Superman, though they never shared adventures inside.

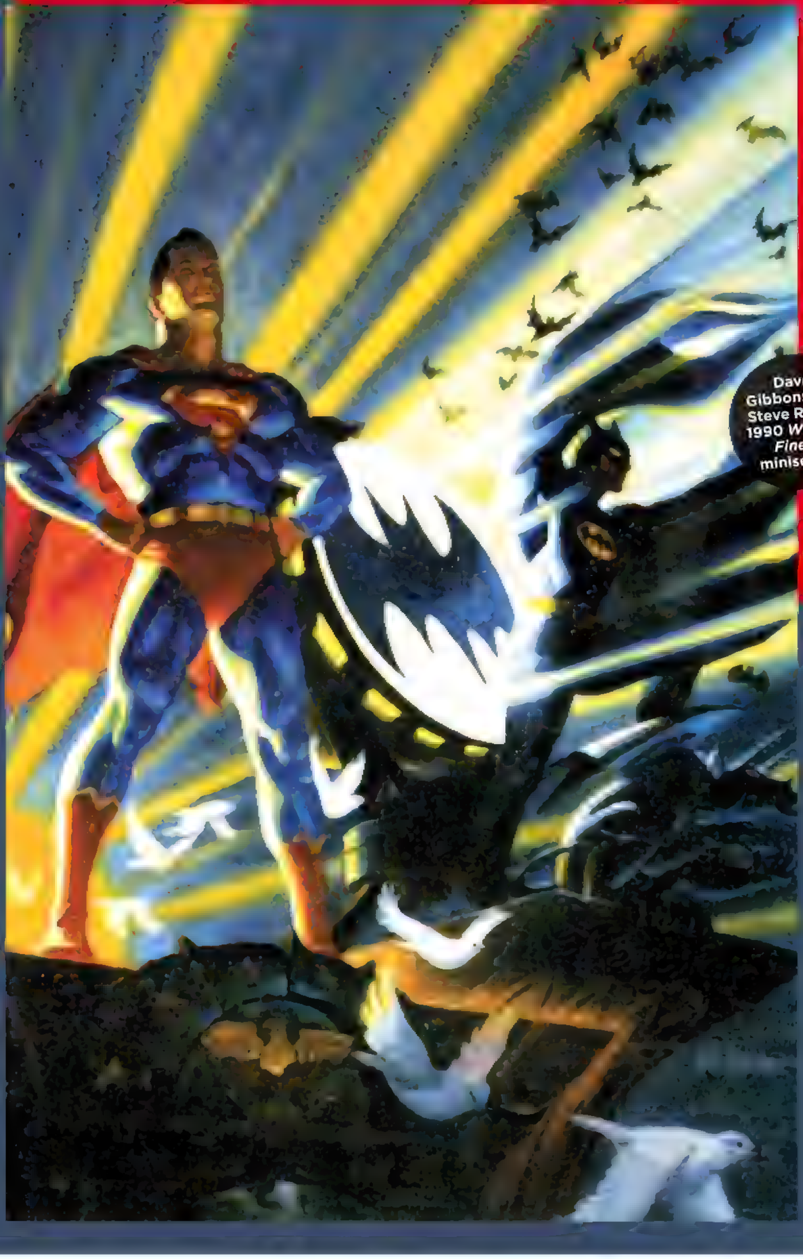
The pair had been first drawn together for the cover of the bumper-sized *New York World's Fair Comics* #2 in 1940 – bizarrely, it wasn't Kane or Shuster or any of the other big names who got the gig, but the relatively lowly Jack Burnley, best known for his patriotic *Superman* covers. The book's title would soon mutate into *World's Best Comics*, then *World's Finest* an issue later.

The regular Batman-meets-Superman covers, however, had dual functions – they established the two leading DC heroes as pals, and they dragged the Dark Knight Detective away from eternal Gotham gloom and into something approaching Superman's sunny world.

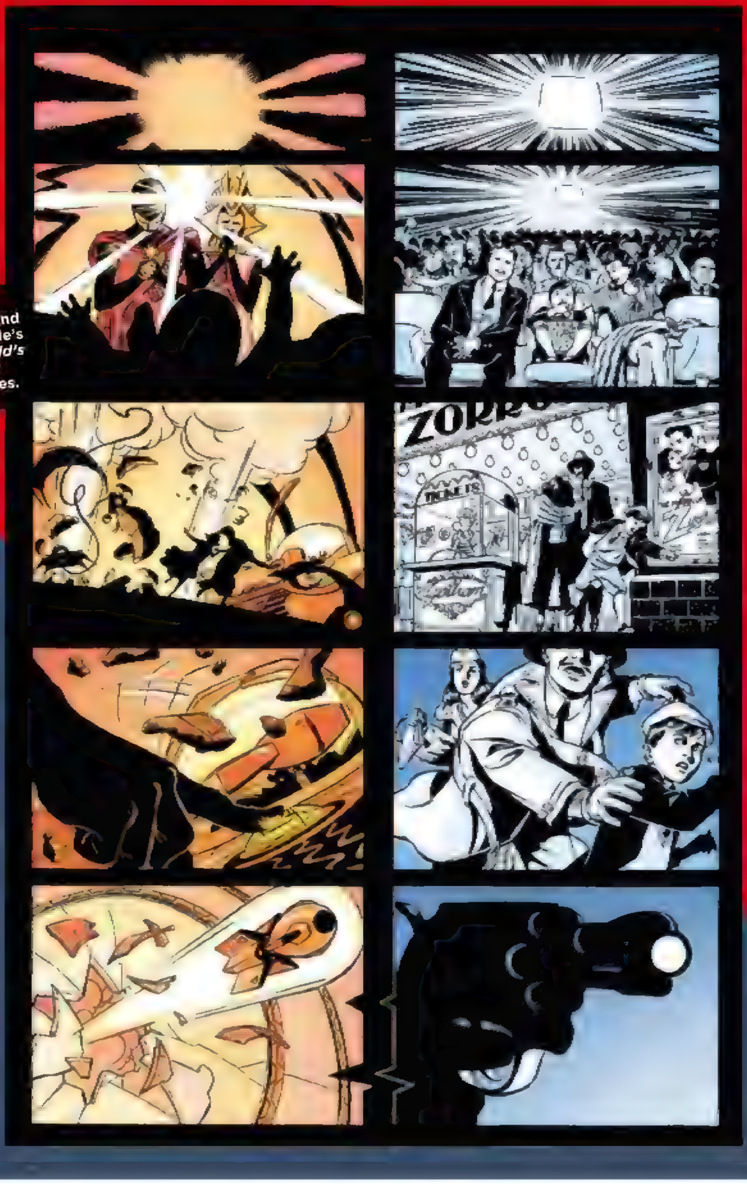
Thus we had a grinning Batman playing softball with an equally cheery Robin and Superman on the cover of #3, or the trio selling "Sink the Japanazis" war bonds on #8, or Supes pulling a giddy Dynamic Duo at super-speed in a hand-drawn cart on #17. (Most hilarious: the three of them riding the giant, phallic guns of a US battleship on #7.)

But all of this changed in 1954 when – now monthly – one of the many reductions in page count saw the *Superman* and *Batman* strips inside combined into one feature from #71 onwards, a status quo that saw the title through to the start of the '70s. Now, finally, the two heroes were working together on a regular basis – but how would they fare?

The answer was: surprisingly well. Yes, there was still the obvious power mismatch to deal with – but other than that the strips proved remarkably compatible. This was a largely happy Batman who'd over the years lost much of his original Kane/Finger gothic doom, and was now cheerily meeting aliens and travelling though time



Dave Gibbons and Steve Rude's 1990 *World's Finest* miniseries.



in his own title. Along the way he'd picked up exotic gadgets and vehicles galore, and it had been just a small step from there to trips abroad and complicated disguises, and then again to time travel and weird transformations (the Merman Batman! The Zebra Batman!) and creatures from Planetoid X.

On the new *World's Finest*, incumbent Bat-artist Dick Sprang and leading *Superman* penciller Curt Swan sometimes collaborated, and the book became a merry mix. Oh sure, Superman was by far the more popular character at the time, and the plots often reflected the gimmick-driven style of his books – but Batman got more than his fair crack. Certainly, his supporting cast tended to dominate (blame *Batman* editor Jack Schiff, who also looked after this title) and Bats was prominent in each tale, usually using his detective skills to pull his weight. (Superman fans sometimes cried foul; their guy was often depicted as dumb brawn to Batman's brains, they said, and they had a point.)

"THE SUPERMAN-BATMAN TEAM!"

While, in general, the Jack Schiff-led *Bat*-line had become cruder and uglier than the *Superman* titles – especially so when Bob Kane and his studio returned to the title, the stiffness always present in the *Batman* co-creator's work seeming to have got worse over the years – there was always imagination there, and a sense of humour. And this was especially true of *World's Finest*, Schiff's personal favourite book.

For one thing, he had perhaps the period's best team on it. There were scripts by Edmond Hamilton, who'd married SF novelist and screenwriter Leigh Brackett and was a major space opera author in his own right (Hamilton had written the *Interstellar Patrol* and *The Star Kings* novel sequences, as well as the *Captain Future* young adult franchise). At DC Hamilton contributed many great Superman tales, but *World's Finest* saw much of his best work. And he was lucky in his artist too: he got Dick Sprang, one of the titans of the Golden Age, and co-creator of both the Riddler and "The Batmobile of 1950".

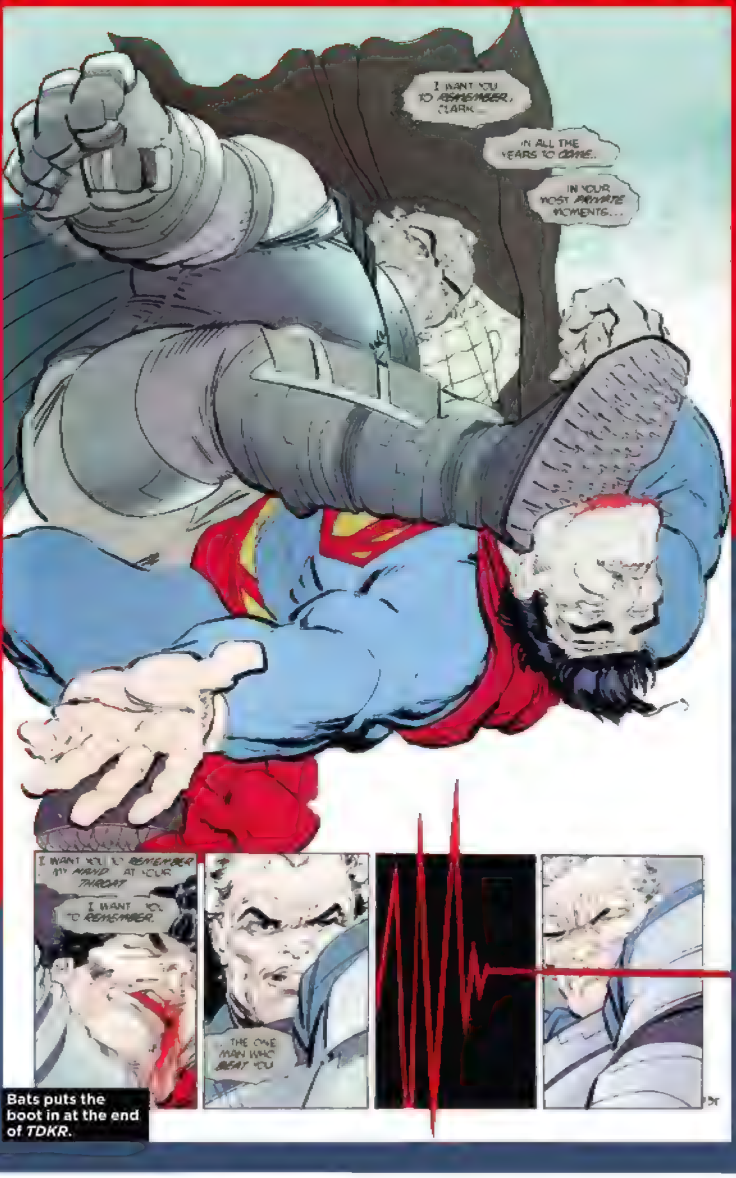
Sprang generally drew small, blocky figures in a deceptively stiff and child-like style, but his faces were expressive, his layouts fluid and dynamic, his lines clean, his tales well-paced and his background details heaving with wit, charm, bold design and unexpected flourishes. A modern *Batman* reader might find it all a bit mental – should their hero really be travelling to different planets and time zones quite so easily? – but it made perfect sense at the time, and had charm to spare.

> **“Bruce and Clark were presented as two peas in a pod”**

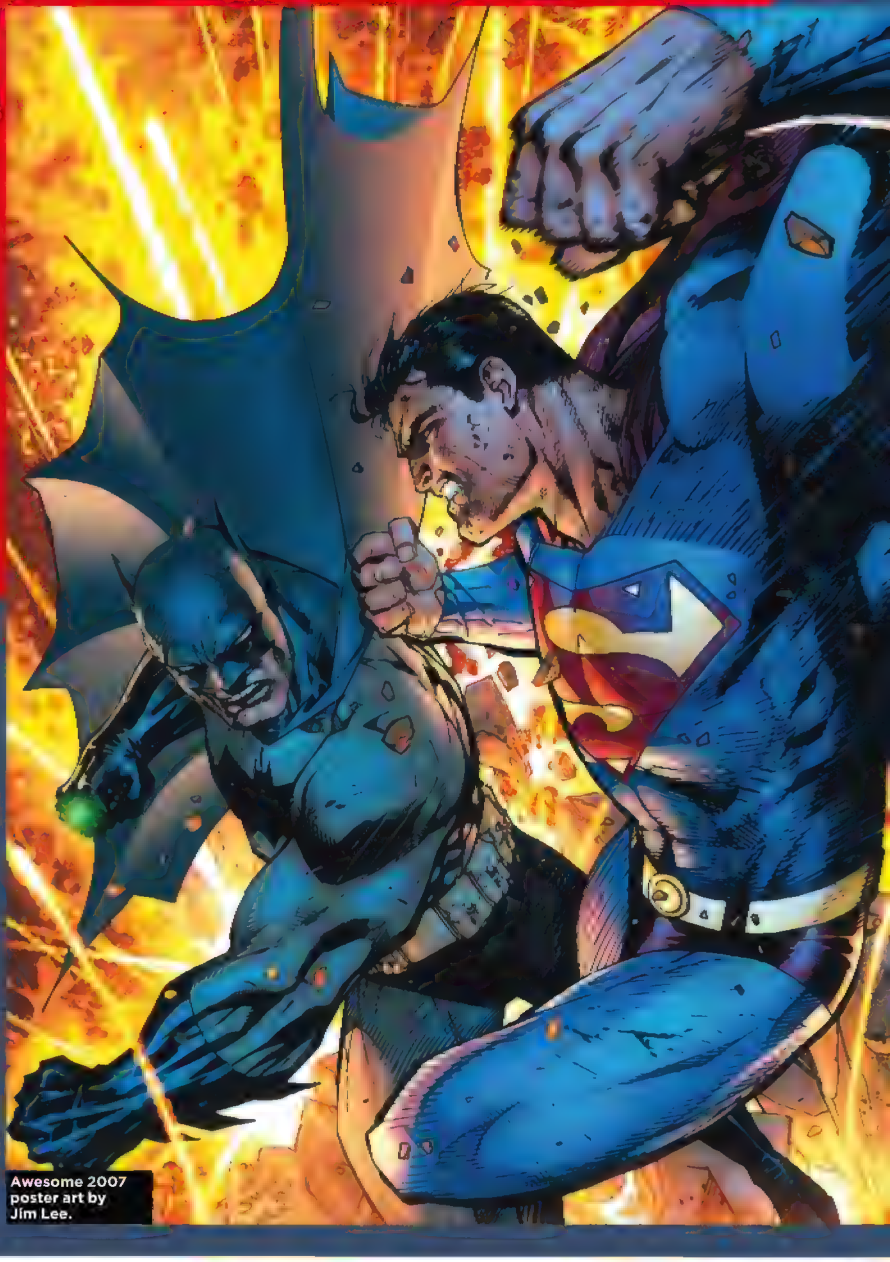
The fine Jim Mooney would become the regular artist on *World's Finest* in time, though he found it hard to reproduce the same sense of fun, and the remaining non-superhero back-up strips would fall away, to be replaced by the likes of *Aquaman*. Soon *World's Finest* was a sort of ark, containing the superheroes (barring Wonder Woman) who'd survived the '50s.

It was at this point, with the title flipped from the smaller *Batman* stable to the *Superman* family of books, as led by formidable-cum-petrifying editor Mort Weisinger, that *World's Finest* enters its glory years, more inventive and livelier than most of the solo Super and Bat-efforts of the era – sporadically, it was the best comic on the stands.

And throughout, Bruce and Clark were presented as two peas in a pod: one »


I WANT YOU TO REMEMBER, CLARK...
IN ALL THE YEARS TO COME...
IN YOUR MOST PRIVATE MOMENTS...
I WANT YOU TO REMEMBER MY HAND AT YOUR THROAT
I WANT YOU TO REMEMBER.
THE ONE MAN WHO BEAT YOU

Bats puts the boot in at the end of *TDKR*.



Awesome 2007 poster art by Jim Lee.

"imaginary" tale has the young Bruce Wayne also adopted by the Kents, making the two heroes brothers, while Jimmy Olsen would often team up with Robin, or Supergirl with Batgirl – if there were parallels to be found, Weisinger would run with them. Clever plotting was king here, rather than in-depth character examination or enduring inter-hero conflict.

Occasionally modernity would impose itself on this cosy, old-fashioned world – like when Neal Adams pencilled a couple of issues in the late '60s, which must have come as a slap in the face to more insular readers – but by that point things had gone pretty stale. Batman had briefly been given the heave-ho, turning the title into an ongoing Superman team-up book – his version of *The Brave And The Bold* – and though Bruce made a permanent return a couple of years later, the whole "*World's Finest*" concept seemed well past its sell-by date. When it was replaced in the mid-'80s by a new Superman title, few mourned.

YOU'RE JUST BONE AND MEAT

In its various revivals, however, *World's Finest* has come closer to living up to its name. The high-end, out-of-continuity and utterly gorgeous 1990 miniseries, written by Dave Gibbons with art by Steve Rude, contrasted the mythologies nicely, for instance – Lex Luther goes to Gotham City, the Joker to Metropolis, and we get strong contrasts between the villains, the hometowns and the supporting casts. It provided a good model for many meetings between the two characters since.

"THE DYNAMIC DUO OF KANDOR!"

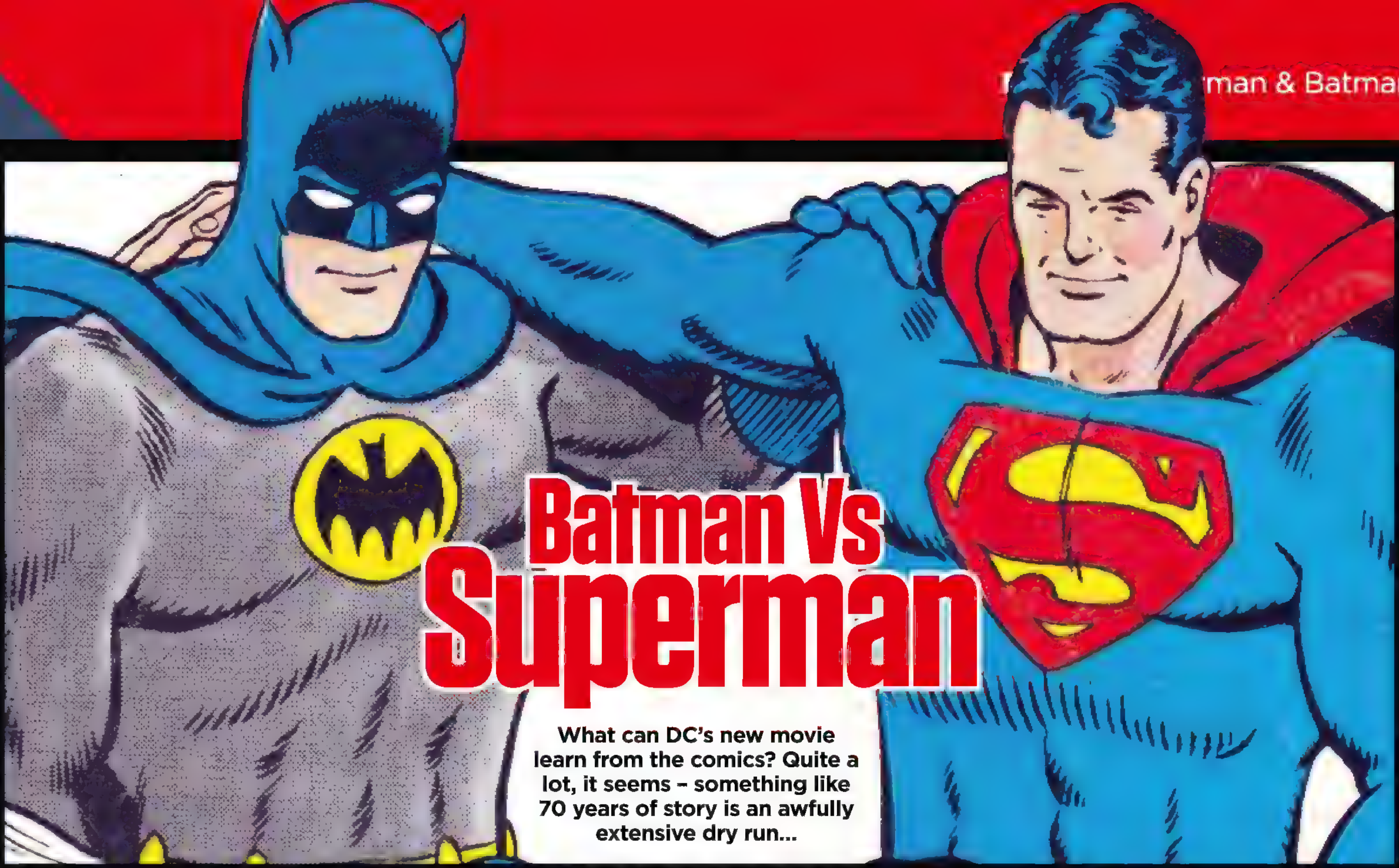
All the while *World's Finest* was running, Batman and Superman would constantly run into each other in the pages of their respective strips too, and usually they were depicted as the best of buddies.

When Hamilton and lead *Superman* artist Curt Swan collaborated on adventures for Superman inside the Bottle City of Kandor – a lost chunk of old Krypton, complete with a thriving population of six million, shrunk until it was small enough to sit on a desk – they soon found a way to compensate for Superman's lack of powers in his home environment. By 1968 Superman could temporarily shrink small enough to visit the Bottle City, and he and his young pal Jimmy Olsen would regularly team up to become its very own Dynamic Duo, Nightwing and Flamebird. Named after famous Kryptonian beasts – there being no bats or robins on Krypton – they had a "Nightcave", drove a "Nightmobile", walked a "Nighthound" and flew into battle using jet-belts. (At one point the real Batman and Robin would even come to visit, similarly shrunk, and the four naturally teamed up.)

And the compliment would be returned years later when, flailing around for a new secret identity after growing too big for Robin's short-shorts, Dick Grayson would take on a new name and costume – Nightwing – in honour of those adventures. (In post *Crisis*-continuity, with Kandor eliminated from history, the name is explained as that of a legendary old Kryptonian crime-fighter who Superman once told Dick about.)

Indeed, it seems that whenever there's a major turning point for one character, the other usually turns up.

So, in the low-key 20th anniversary issue of Superman's adventures – *Action*



Batman Vs Superman

What can DC's new movie learn from the comics? Quite a lot, it seems – something like 70 years of story is an awfully extensive dry run...

Following the success of the Marvel model – where the big screen fictional universe is as integrated as the comic book ones have long been – the plan at DC/Warner Bros now appears to be to launch a whole raft of similarly interconnected movies, starting with Zack Snyder's *Man Of Steel* sequel, written by David S Goyer, due in 2015 and to co-star Batman too.

Henry Cavill will return as Clark Kent/Superman, with Ben Affleck signed on as a fresh new Bruce Wayne (don't believe the internet anti-hype – he's a great choice); *Batman Vs Superman* is the likely name. A Justice League movie – and then solo outings for Flash, Wonder Woman and perhaps even another Green Lantern – should follow, but the keystone, as ever, remains Bruce and Clark. If their story flies then so, perhaps, does an onscreen DC universe.

DC's currently tight-lipped about what the film will actually contain but what lessons can the filmmakers learn from the comics? After all, both characters' first, best medium had decades in which to work out a successful strategy for containing Batman and Superman – so different in terms of power levels, approach and general mood – within the same story, and it would be a foolish movie maker indeed who didn't take heed.

Here, then are our dos and don'ts, based on a lifetime of comics history...

1 Don't have too many big fights

In what giant, free-for-all donnybrook does an elephant fight side-by-side with a mouse? Answer: they don't, and if they did, the mouse would get squashed pronto. (The comics have tried it repeatedly with Batman and Superman, and it always looks ridiculous – and surely more so on the big screen.) The smart thing would be to have each partner use what he has to best advantage, and in the case of die fledermaus, that means being sneaky...

2 Don't rob Supes of his powers

Countless issues of *World's Finest* did this, levelling the playing field but in doing so effectively admitting defeat: it says nothing so much as "we don't know what to do with our hero".

3 Do let Batman prepare

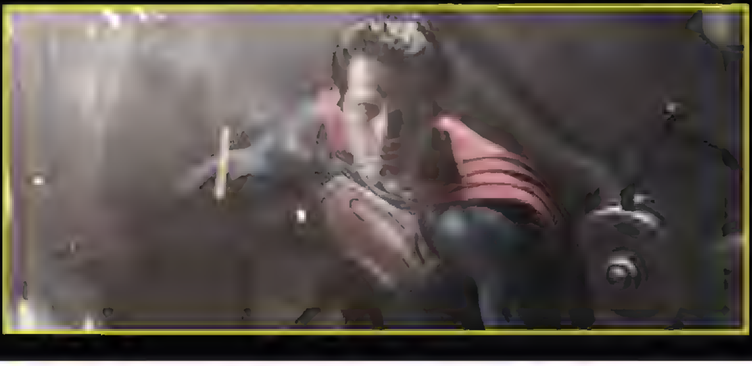
Like any good decorator, Batman knows there's power in prep. In Gotham City he cuts an imposing figure, but in the larger superhero world he's always outgunned – which means he needs an edge. The JLA's "Tower Of Babel" storyline revolved around just this: what happens if something triggers all the traps Batman has prepared for his Justice League pals in case they go rogue? (Apparently, Bruce had always planned to take out Superman by using his super-senses against him...)

4 Do let Batman cheat

If it ever does come to all-out conflict – and the movie promises it will – Batman does whatever he can to swing the odds his way, usually involving picking the time and location, and then loading the fight-space with Kryptonite. In the classic battle at the end of *The Dark Knight Returns*, he uses a robot-suit, psychological warfare, and an arrow of the green stuff – and still loses.

5 Do make Batman pay for mixing with the big boys

In *The Dark Knight Returns* fight, Batman dies fighting Superman, his heart overwhelmed. (Or seems to!) In the *JLA* tale "Rock Of Ages", Batman holds the line against Darkseid – and is destroyed. For all his abilities, smarts and toys, Batman's human, and playing out of his league – and it means he can't afford a single mistake. When he does make one, the consequences must be dire.



6 Don't make Superman dumb

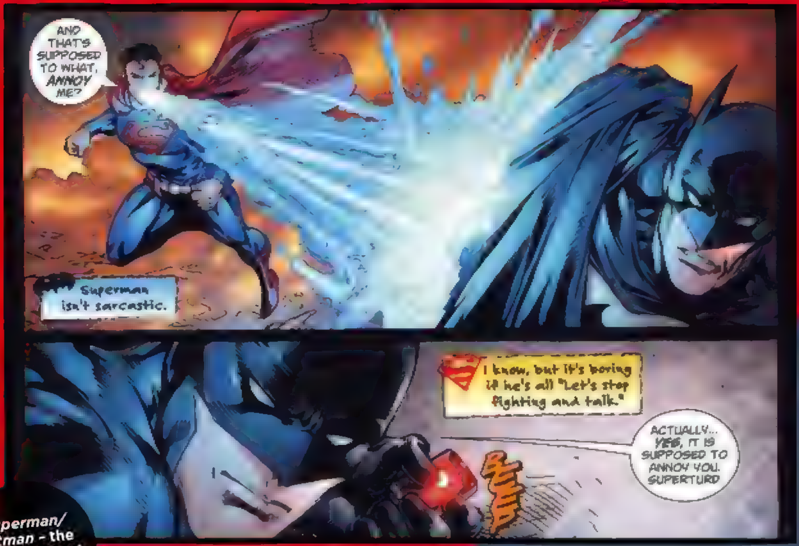
Too many *World's Finest* tales had Superman as the big, stupid muscleman, in contrast to Batman's brains – but though Clark has never been the schemer that Bruce is, such depictions are belittling and ring false.

7 Do show Superman cares

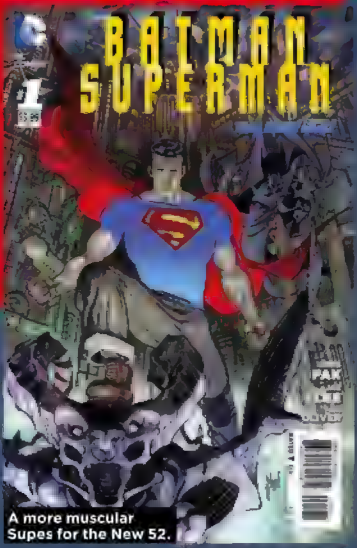
Batman worries about winning; everything in his life is subjugated to this obsession. But Superman is, in fact, the more rounded individual – with many interests, many agendas, some of which Bruce Wayne is barely aware of. Kal-El is not one of us entirely, and he operates on a different scale – respect that.

8 Do remember that Batman is the superhero John McClane

The Grant Morrison run on *JLA* heaves with great Batman and Superman moments, and any filmmaker would be well advised to rob it blind. In the first tale, the JLA is defeated by mysterious aliens, but the Batman seems to have escaped, and is stalking through their base. "What can a pathetic, fragile creature like Batman do to us?" scoffs the alien. "He's only a man!" And in his death-trap, Superman slyly smiles.

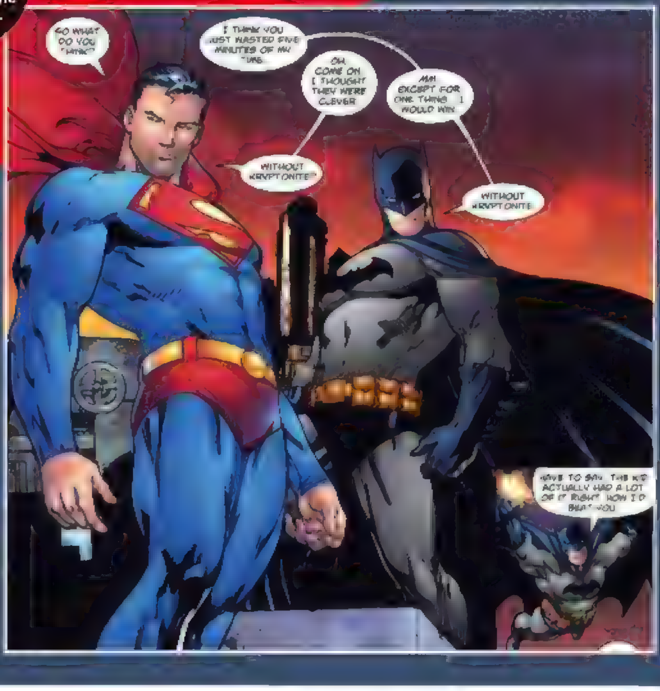

AND THAT'S SUPPOSED TO WHAT, ANNOY ME?
Superman isn't sarcastic.
I know, but it's boring if he's all "Let's stop fighting and talk."
ACTUALLY... YES, IT IS SUPPOSED TO ANNOY YOU, SUPERTURD

Superman/Batman – the World's Finest update for the noughties.


BATMAN SUPERMAN
1
PAK
LEE

A more muscular Supes for the New 52.

DC OUR WORLDS AT WAR
AFTERMATH
CASEY
CIFUENTES


SO WHAT DO YOU THINK?
I THINK YOU JUST WASTED FIVE MINUTES OF MY TIME.
OH, COME ON. I THOUGHT THEY WERE CLEVER
WITHOUT KRYPTONITE
MM. EXCEPT FOR ONE THING. I WOULD WIN
WITHOUT KRYPTONITE
HAVE TO SAY, THE KID ACTUALLY HAD A LOT OF IT RIGHT. HOW I'D BEAT YOU

DC COMICS
2
BATMAN SUPERMAN
THE NEW 52!
GREG PAK
JAE LEE

#241, from 1958 – we were first introduced to the Fortress of Solitude, sure, but it's our hero putting his feet up, doing some painting (thanks to his telescopic vision it's a Martian landscape) and goofing around with pal Batman that we remember best.

And so it's been, their lives in parallel. For every Jimmy, there's a Robin; for every Batcave, there's a Fortress of Solitude; for every Krypto, an Ace the Bat-Hound. (There was even a Bat-Ape to go with Beppo the Super-Monkey!) Both even suffered early '90s trauma at the same time – Superman's death countered by Batman's broken back. Whatever happens in the DC Universe, it seems, at the centre you'll always find something going on between these two men.

"THE DAY SUPERMAN BETRAYED BATMAN!"

And so to the modern era. Most recent depictions of the Superman/Batman relationship have been very different to the "best buddies" act of their early history. Indeed, since the '80s we've been mostly shown them as wary, respectful allies, grudgingly accepting stark philosophical differences in their approaches to crime-fighting.

Bruce Wayne has fewer natural gifts and a more violent, troubled milieu in which to operate – and so the warm-hearted, essentially optimistic Kal-El gives him some slack, accepting his friend and rival's more pessimistic and driven approach. Both respects the other greatly, you feel – but they're frustrated by, and even suspicious of, their ally nonetheless.

And, sometimes, they're even depicted as enemies.

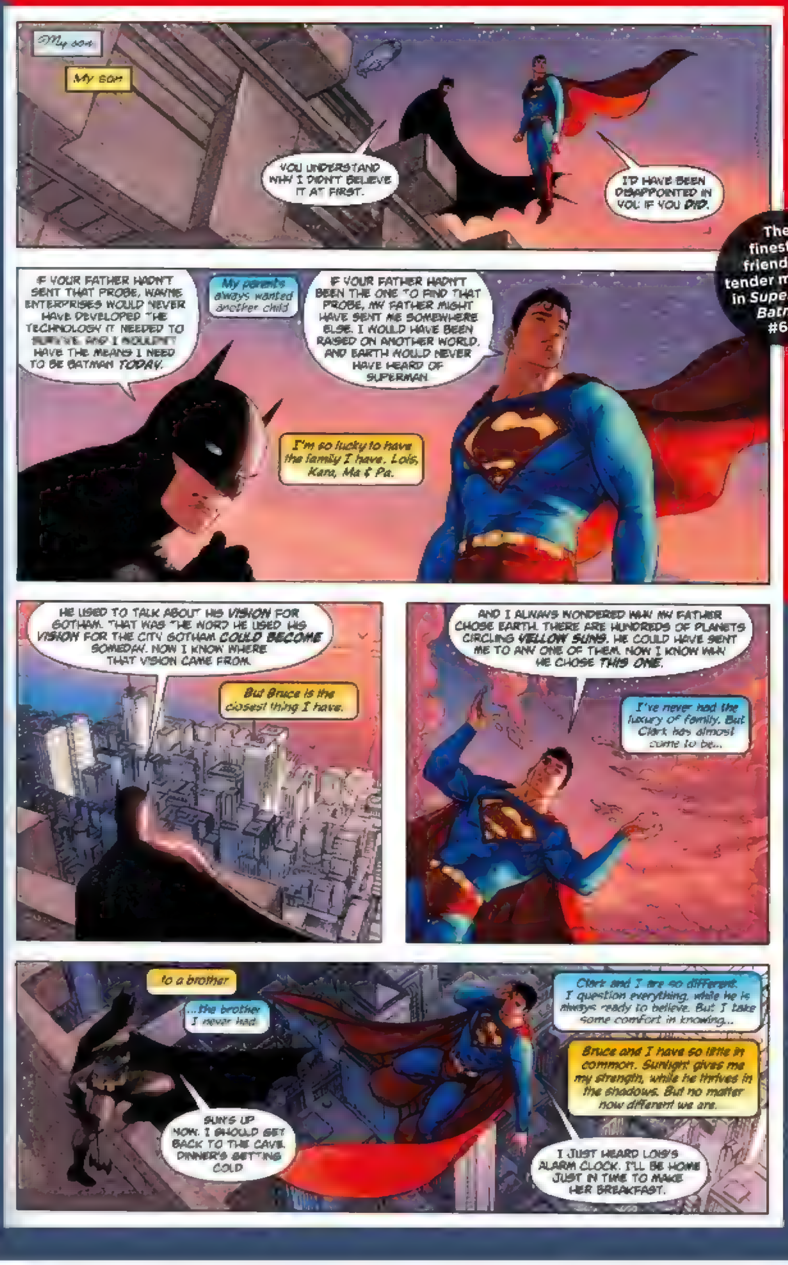
Perhaps the most chilling, fascinating vision of the differences between Batman and Superman came in Frank Miller's watershed mini-series *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns*, telling of a not-too-distant dystopian future where civilisation is crumbling, a 50ish Bruce Wayne has hung up the Bat-suit and is drinking heavily, and the other heroes have died, retired or disappeared. All, that is, except for Superman, who's established a compromise: he'll work covertly for the US government, and save people where he can.

Except that's not good enough for Batman, and when an urban gang called the Mutants runs riot in Gotham, and the likes of the Joker and Two-Face threaten to return, a fierce Bruce pulls on the mask once more. Now a clash with the pragmatic Clark Kent is only a matter of time.

(Later, Alex Ross and Mark Waid would tell a different vision of the future in *Kingdom Come*, where a level-headed Bruce Wayne must mediate between a warlike Wonder Woman and a pacifist Superman, this pair now a couple with very different opinions on how to confront a new, ultra-violent generation of superheroes.)

The Dark Knight Returns was set in the future, and outside regular DC continuity, but it was followed by a 1986 ground-up overhaul of Superman by star artist John Byrne – fresh from *Fantastic Four* and *X-Men* at Marvel – in the wake of the house-clearing miniseries *Crisis On Infinite Earths*. Byrne's *Man Of Steel* miniseries would see the two premier DC heroes meet once again "for the very first time", a green, just-learning-his-trade Superman initially very suspicious of the mysterious vigilante he hears is terrorising the criminal fraternity of Gotham.

And the status quo would change again with the once-more-reordered continuity of the so-called "New Earth" that's dominated DC post-*Infinite Crisis* – the firm's second,


My son
My son
YOU UNDERSTAND WHY I DIDN'T BELIEVE IT AT FIRST.
I'D HAVE BEEN DISAPPOINTED IN YOU IF YOU *DID*.
IF YOUR FATHER HADN'T SENT THAT PROBE, WAYNE ENTERPRISES WOULD NEVER HAVE DEVELOPED THE TECHNOLOGY IT NEEDED TO SURVIVE AND I WOULDN'T HAVE THE MEANS I NEED TO BE BATMAN *TODAY*.
My parents always wanted another child
IF YOUR FATHER HADN'T BEEN THE ONE TO FIND THAT PROBE, MY FATHER MIGHT HAVE SENT ME SOMEWHERE ELSE. I WOULD HAVE BEEN RAISED ON ANOTHER WORLD. AND EARTH WOULD NEVER HAVE HEARD OF SUPERMAN.
I'm so lucky to have the family I have. Lois, Kara, Ma & Pa.
HE USED TO TALK ABOUT HIS *VISION* FOR GOTHAM. THAT WAS THE WORD HE USED. HIS *VISION* FOR THE CITY GOTHAM *COULD BECOME* SOMEDAY. NOW I KNOW WHERE THAT VISION CAME FROM.
But Bruce is the closest thing I have.
AND I ALWAYS WONDERED WHY MY FATHER CHOSE EARTH. THERE ARE HUNDREDS OF PLANETS CIRCLING *YELLOW SUNS*. HE COULD HAVE SENT ME TO ANY ONE OF THEM. NOW I KNOW WHY HE CHOSE *THIS ONE*.
I've never had the luxury of family. But Clark has almost come to be...
to a brother
...the brother I never had.
Clark and I are so different. I question everything, while he is always ready to believe. But I take some comfort in knowing...
Bruce and I have so little in common. Sunlight gives me my strength, while he thrives in the shadows. But no matter how different we are.
SUN'S UP NOW. I SHOULD GET BACK TO THE CAVE. DINNER'S GETTING COLD.
I JUST HEARD LOIS'S ALARM CLOCK. I'LL BE HOME JUST IN TIME TO MAKE HER BREAKFAST.

The finest of friends? A tender moment in *Superman/Batman* #60.

2005 attempt at a line-wide revamp that "changes everything you thought you knew". Now Superman and Batman are depicted as having been friends for longer, and as rather more comfortable with each other – though a gap remains still. Yes, there is trust. Yes, each has the other's back, and there is respect and camaraderie and admiration and shared purpose.

But the two men are so different, from such clashing worlds and with such wide-apart approaches to their mutual job, that relentless no-holds-barred conflict hovers in the background. Which is, you feel, only ever a bad day away.

"THE FEUD BETWEEN BATMAN AND SUPERMAN"

In 2013, of course, the Batman-Superman duo is as important to DC – and its parent company, Time Warner – as it's ever been. From 2003-2011 a *Superman/Batman* monthly comic book series (an update of *World's Finest*, of course) ran successfully under writer Jeph Loeb and others, teamed with such superstar pencillers as Ed McGuinness and the late Michael Turner. Following the precedent set by Frank Miller and then John Byrne in the mid-'80s, it depicted these once firm pals as basically at odds with each other, a dual narration structure revealing their often differing viewpoints to the reader. The iconic power of both was clear, however – there was no actual name of the book on the cover, just the two heroes' chest logos superimposed on top of each other.

More recently yet, a new series – *Batman-Superman*, by Greg Pak and the striking artist Jae Lee – has launched as part of the New 52, DC's latest, highly successful line-wide reboot. Initially set before the forming of the Justice League in this new continuity, it tells, once again, of their first, suspicious meetings as young heroes. *Batman-Superman* (the shift in name order is telling) is currently a fixture of the Top 10 sales charts, and with *Batman*, *Superman Unchained* and the Bruce/Clark-centric *Justice League* all hovering around the top slots too, the importance to DC of its two marquee characters has never been greater.

Meanwhile, where it really matters – to the money-men at least – DC's movie fortunes have been up and down in recent years. (Certainly much more so than at Marvel, where the trend is for each film to act as a stepping stone to another, bigger one.) They've enjoyed success, of course – with Christopher Nolan's (very much standalone) *Batman* trilogy, and, to a lesser degree, the divisive Superman reboot, *Man Of Steel*. But the big budget *Green Lantern* was a notable damp squib, and the likes of Flash and Wonder Woman currently seem like in no way sure things.

The answer? A new Batman-Superman film, of course – a team-up to excite interest in the entire line. We look at the prospects for that elsewhere on this page, but the very idea of it brings one glaringly obvious fact about the comics into sharper focus than ever: when the Batman-Superman pairing works, so does DC. They might not always be firm friends, they might not always like each other – but nothing matters more. CH

> **“Whatever happens in the DCU, at the centre you'll always find these two”**

***Batman-Superman** is on sale now; Zack Snyder's **Batman vs Superman** is due in 2015.*

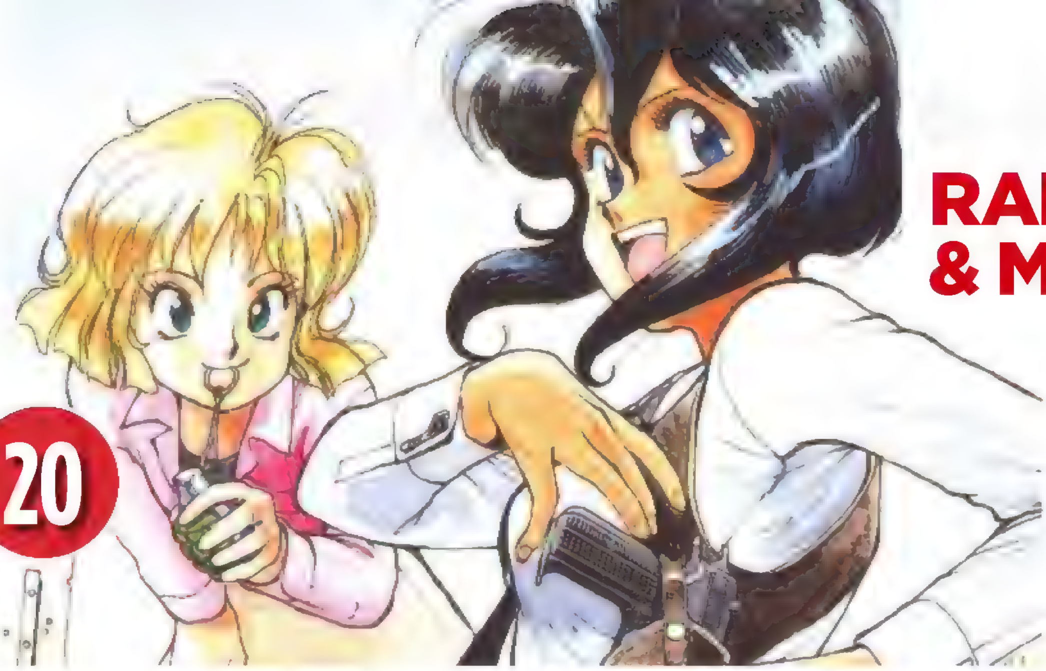
THE LEAGUE OF SUPERFRIENDS

Team-ups are all over the comics, but genuine friendships are a rather rarer breed. Meet the superguys (and occasionally girls) who always put bros before foes... **By Matt Bielby**

Superheroes all know each other; they often fight, and occasionally hang out – that's just the way it is in comics. But genuine, believable friendships between two super-types are a rather rarer thing. We're not interested in groups of buddies here – so no Mutant Turtles or Warriors Three – or anything where the relationship is primarily romantic (so bye-bye Daredevil and the Black Widow – and Apollo and Midnighter, come to that). There's nothing getting in the way of pure, platonic, one-on-one friendship here – which is why Batman and Superman don't appear. There's simply too much edge involved.

Also disallowed, by the way: characters who originated in other mediums (so no Fafhrd and the Gray Mouser); those where there's more of a mentor/protege thing going on (bye-bye Batman and Robin, so long Wolverine and Kitty Pryde); and friendships between heroes and non-powered characters (so don't expect to come across names like "Foggy Nelson").

Naturally, in the following list we break all of our rules...



20

RALLY VINCENT & MINNIE-MAY

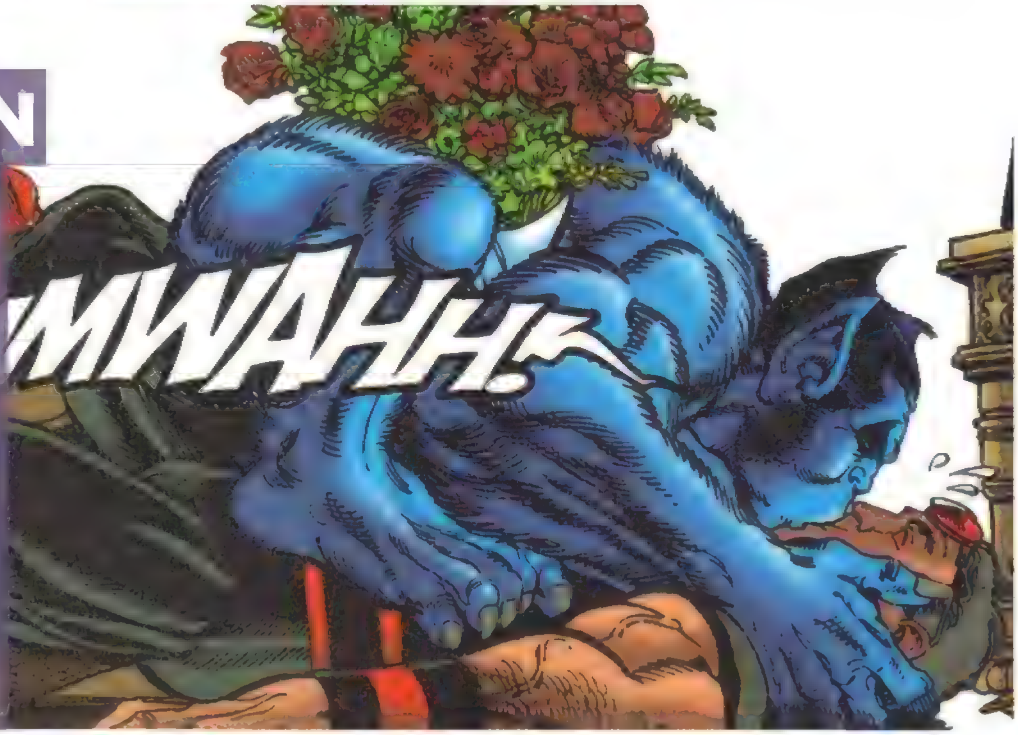
The Gunsmith Cats are a pair of striking young female bounty hunters in modern Chicago, and fairly big manga stars. Boy-shy but highly capable "Rally" Vincent is a 19-year-old Anglo-Indian gun-shop owner, muscle car lover and sure-shot; her tiny, cheery, hot-tempered pal "Minnie" May Hopkins is a yet younger ex-prostitute and explosives expert. Together they drive and shoot like demons as they tackle drug lords and mobsters. They're an unlikely pair, "Minnie" May especially, but for a fun depiction of slightly unhinged bad girls sticking it to the boys, they're hard to beat.

BEAST & WONDERMAN

19

Original X-Man Beast spent much of the '80s as a key member of the Avengers, where he began an enduring buddy-buddy relationship with Wonder Man, a one-time villain, now revived with an "ionic" body who really wants to be a movie actor. Utilised mostly as fun-loving comic relief – Marvel's answer to Booster Gold and Blue Beetle, perhaps – the pair's bantering, boozing and bouncing around the Avengers Mansion quickly became the Marvel U's premier bromance.

The company hasn't had much room for these two to spend any time together in recent years, however – or, at least, it hadn't until this year's *A+X* #12, which rekindled their "wild and crazy guys" thing for the first time in many years. Of course, they've been on different sides of any number of issues umpteen times since, so expecting things to remain quite as they used to be might be a little too much to ask…



18

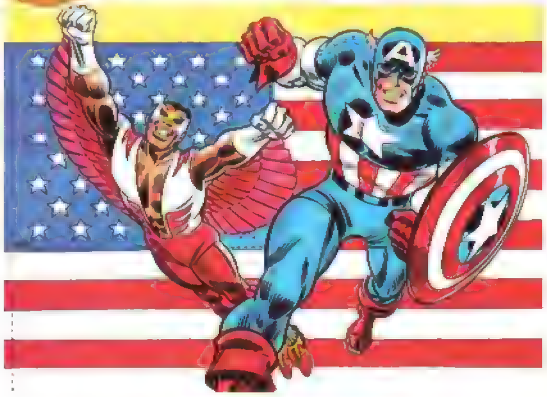
STARMAN & SHADE

STARMAN
OMNIBUS

When James Robinson revived the old Starman character in 1994, he brought in ex-villain Shade – a '40s *Flash* bad guy, who'd made sporadic appearances post-*Crisis* and had been dramatically rethought following *Zero Hour* in 1994 – as a cynical, amoral, shades-of-grey mentor and friend to Jack Knight, the new, reluctant Starman, and son of the original '40s hero. This version of Shade began his career in a Dickensian London, and retains rakish qualities; he swiftly became a fan-favourite character, with the dialogue between the two leads a particular delight. Indeed, there's barely a duff scene involving the characters at all – and the series that can claim that is rare indeed.

17

CAPTAIN AMERICA & THE FALCON



Captain America has had entertaining relationships with numerous other heroes – Hawkeye in the Avengers springs to mind – but edgy, streetwise the Falcon, mainstream US comics' first black American superhero and Cap's partner from 1969 for the best part of a decade, seems more important somehow. Cap's an old-fashioned hero, and his modern day adventures work best when emphasising his man-out-of-time qualities; Falcon was from Harlem, and just the guy to show his partner "the real America". Though from a good family, social worker Sam Wilson had been driven to rage when his mother was shot dead in a mugging; his background flirts with supervillains, militancy and gangs, and his life since Cap has seen him involved with numerous event storylines and teams. But it's for the '70s that we love him best when, under writer Steve Englehart, he was key to such major storylines as "Secret Empire", wherein Cap discovers the rot at the heart of the United States.

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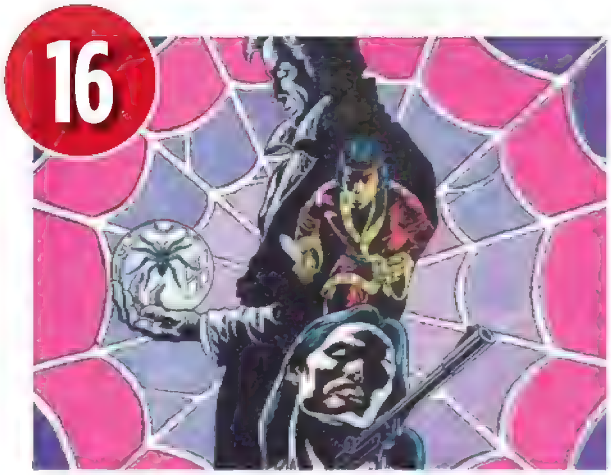

SHANG-CHI & CLIVE RESTON

One of the greatest books Marvel put out in the '70s and early '80s was *Shang-Chi, Master Of Kung Fu*. Like a cross between Sherlock Holmes and Bond – both high on Sunny Delight – it introduced us to Fu Manchu's hitherto unheard of estranged son, the living weapon known as Shang-Chi. He had a few issues, and worked them out with the aid of rogue elements from British Intelligence, including substitute father Sir Denis Nayland Smith, and snooty, self-aware spy Clive Reston.

Shang-Chi is calm and self-contained, Reston a charmer, a drinker and somewhat vulnerable – though an effective operative nonetheless. Women would come between them on occasion, but this was one of the great alliances of opposites.

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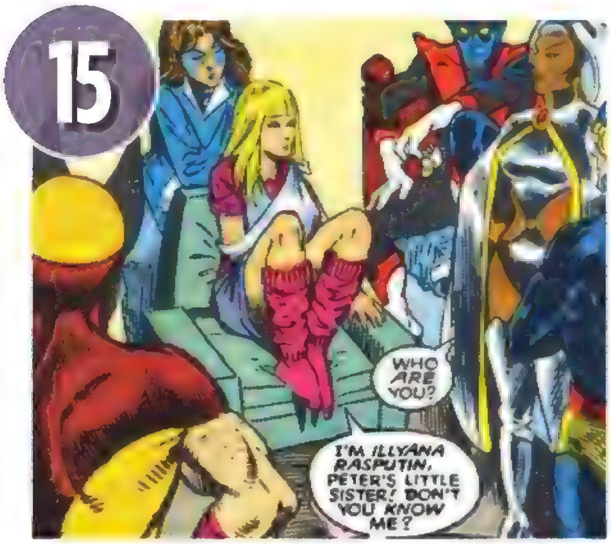
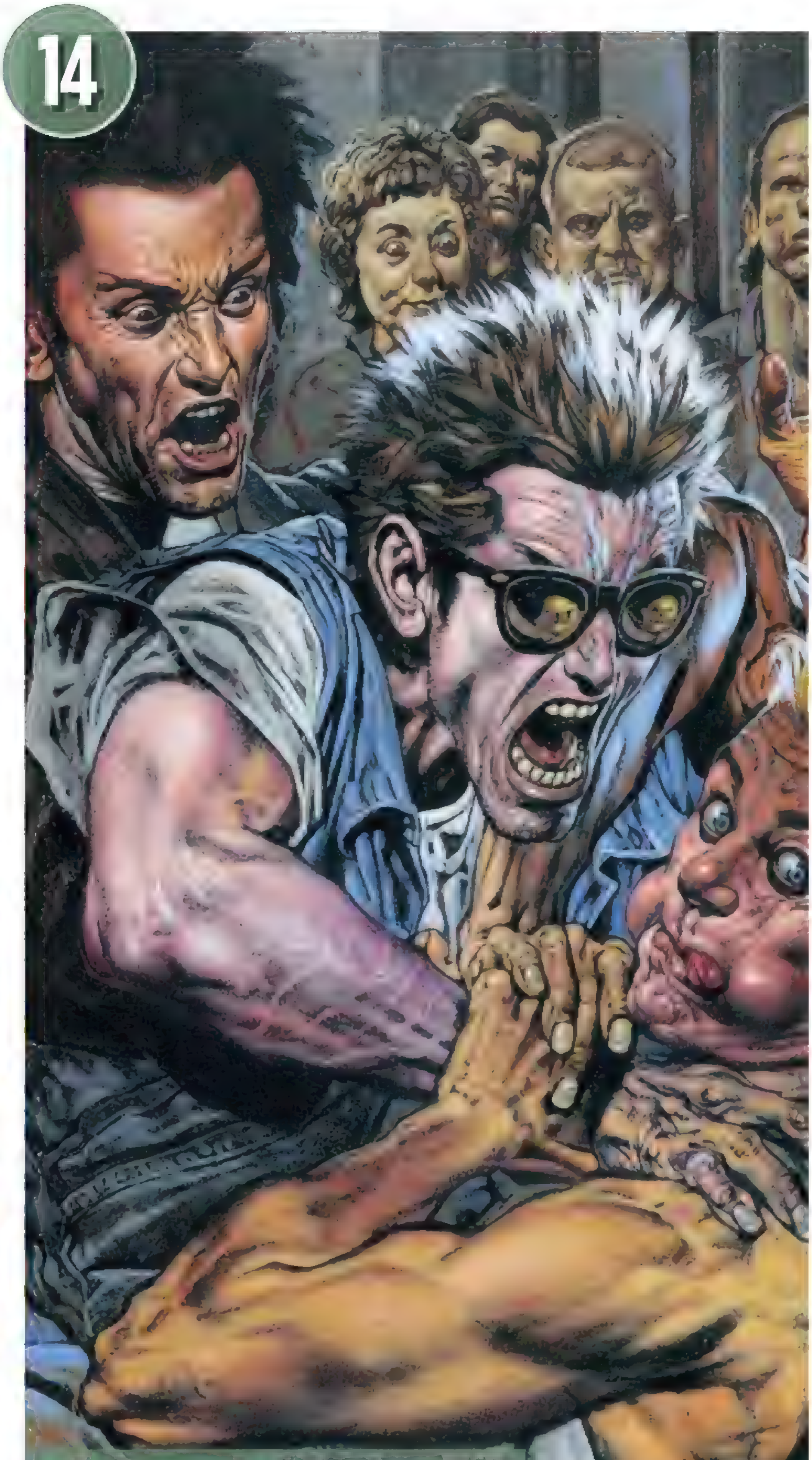

WHO ARE YOU?
I'M ILLYANA RASPUTIN, PETER'S LITTLE SISTER! DON'T YOU KNOW ME?

KITTY PRYDE & ILLYANA RASPUTINA

The Chris Claremont *X-Men* years heaved with sound, believable relationships of every stripe, but one of the most touching was that between Kitty Pryde and Illyana Rasputin (now called Rasputina, since Marvel worked out how Russian surnames work). Both girls were 13 and seemed to share a psychic bond, plus long walks, teasing chats, pillow fights and midnight feasts; later events scuppered things between them somewhat – Kitty went to live in England, Illyana reverted to childhood again – but for a number of years of classic *X-Men* this was one of the comics' strongest depictions of Best Female Friends.

14



JESSE CUSTER & CASSIDY

Male friendship under pressure is one of the great Garth Ennis themes, and the one depicted in his modern Western, *Preacher*, is a doozy. Jesse is a small-town Texas church man with a rock 'n' roll attitude, a shaky faith, but huge supernatural power. His best pal Proinsias Cassidy is a hard-living Irish vampire, 100 years old or more, and pure trouble – though he doesn't really mean harm, at least most of the time. In time the two fall out, over a woman and Cassidy's destructive behaviour, but redemption is possible, it seems – even for the worst of sinners. The ending is happy, of a sort, and though no reunion is allowed between them, riding off into the sunset separately seems perfectly allowed.

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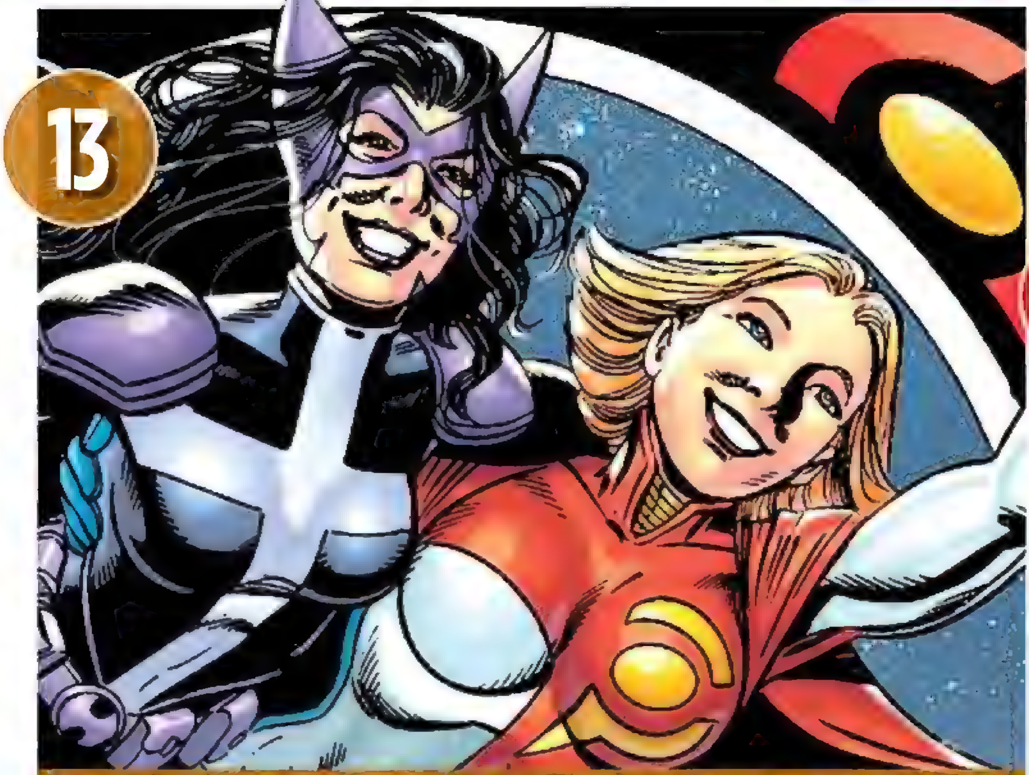
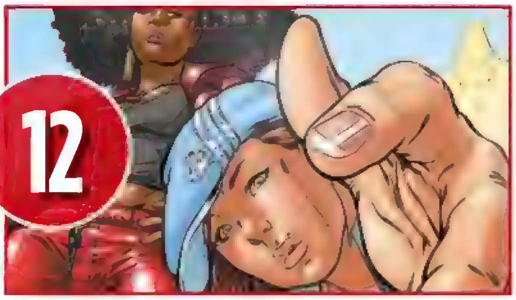


HUNTRESS & POWER GIRL

Though they're not called Batgirl and Supergirl, that's basically what we're dealing with here. Huntress is an edgy, violent heroine who started out as the daughter of Bruce Wayne and Catwoman on Earth-Two, but post-*Crisis* was explained as a Mafia princess gone straight(ish). Power Girl has one of the most aggressively sexual costumes in comics, and a raft of conflicting origins involving Krypton, Atlantis and all sorts.

In the New 52, the pair are the stars of a reborn *Worlds' Finest* (note the slight punctuation modification), with Huntress once again Helena Wayne from Earth-Two and Power Girl Superman's cousin from the same universe; two mismatched heroines in a strange new world, it's their banter and entertaining characterisation that's made the book a minor hit. Ex-DC President Paul Levitz has proven himself one of our best writers of dialogue here, and their always engaging chats are what's bringing readers back, more than any number of crossover tricks of [illegible].

12



MISTY KNIGHT & COLLEEN WING

Superhero comics have been remarkably light – *X-Men* aside – on female friendships. One that's endured since the '70s, however, is that between Misty Knight and Colleen Wing, ass-kicking chicks who first appeared in strips like *Marvel Premiere*'s *Iron Fist*, and issues of *Marvel Team-Up* and *Deadly Hands Of Kung-Fu*. Misty is a tough blaxploitation detective with a big afro and a bionic arm; Colleen is a Japanese-American lass with samurai skills. As the so-called "Daughters of the Dragon", they usually work as private investigators through their own firm, Knightwing Restorations or, more recently, Heroes For Hire. The strength of their friendship has its roots in the various Chris Claremont-written issues of assorted titles that really established them as a team, and though they've occasionally been mishandled since, they remain one of the most vibrant, sparky all-female teams in comics.

STRONTIUM DOG & WULF

11

2000 AD isn't much built around friendship – Judge Dredd, the ultimate grim, homicidal loner, no matter how much he works for society, kinda sets the pace – but there are buddy teams here if you look hard enough. One of the best has always been that between rebellious, occasionally time-travelling mutant bounty hunter Johnny Alpha from 2180, and his blunt Viking partner Wulf Sternhammer, eventually revealed to have been stolen from the distant past and dragged to the 22nd century during one of Johnny's cross-time missions. Always space Westerns at heart, an epic late '80s revenge story "Max Bubba"/"Rage" saw a cold, brutal Johnny hunt down and murder the criminal gang who'd killed his partner, thus robbing him of his straightforward best friend, a loyal rock who'd consistently dragged Johnny back from crippling self-doubt and introspection. Johnny himself would eventually die too, but more recent stories following a 1999 revival have brought back the original team, initially by the simple device of setting these tales in the years before the two characters died. Though the grim Johnny Alpha is very much the star, the broadly-drawn Wulf is vital to most great *Strontium Dog* stories: unflappable, vaguely ludicrous, and exactly who you want watching your back in a scrap. Johnny was ruined without him.

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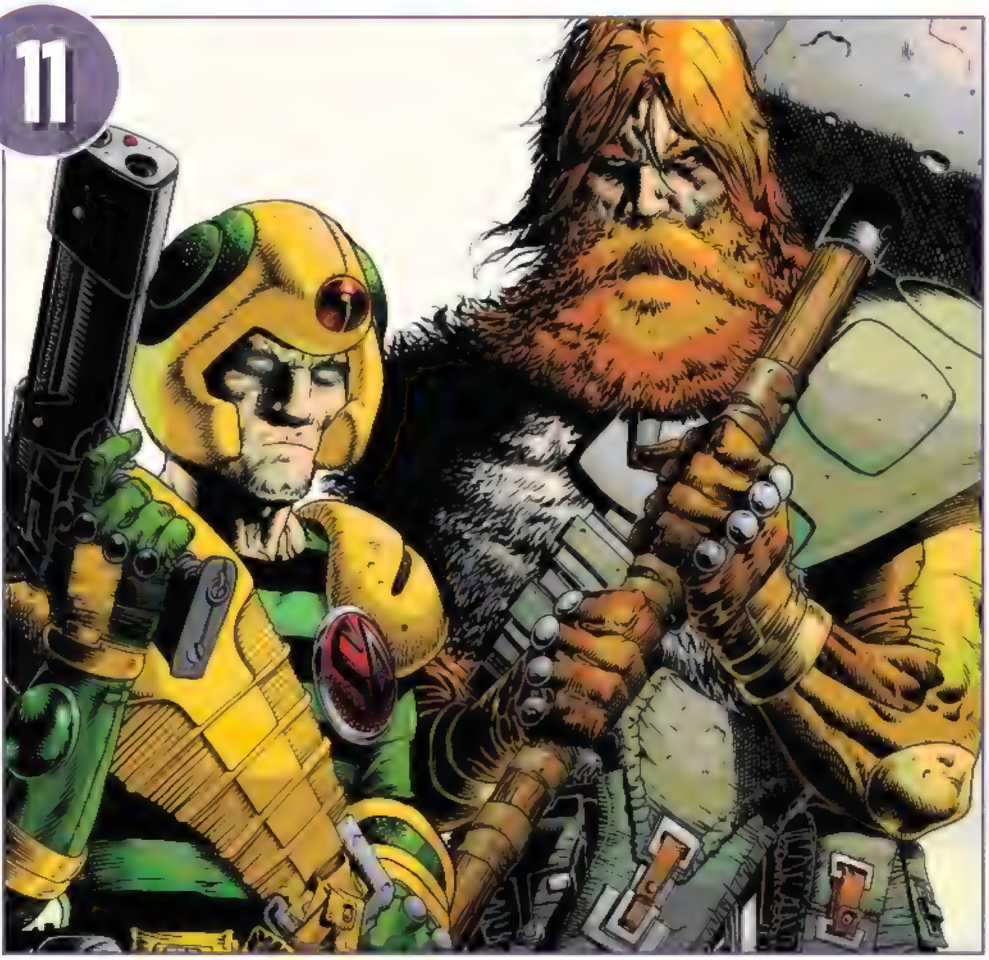

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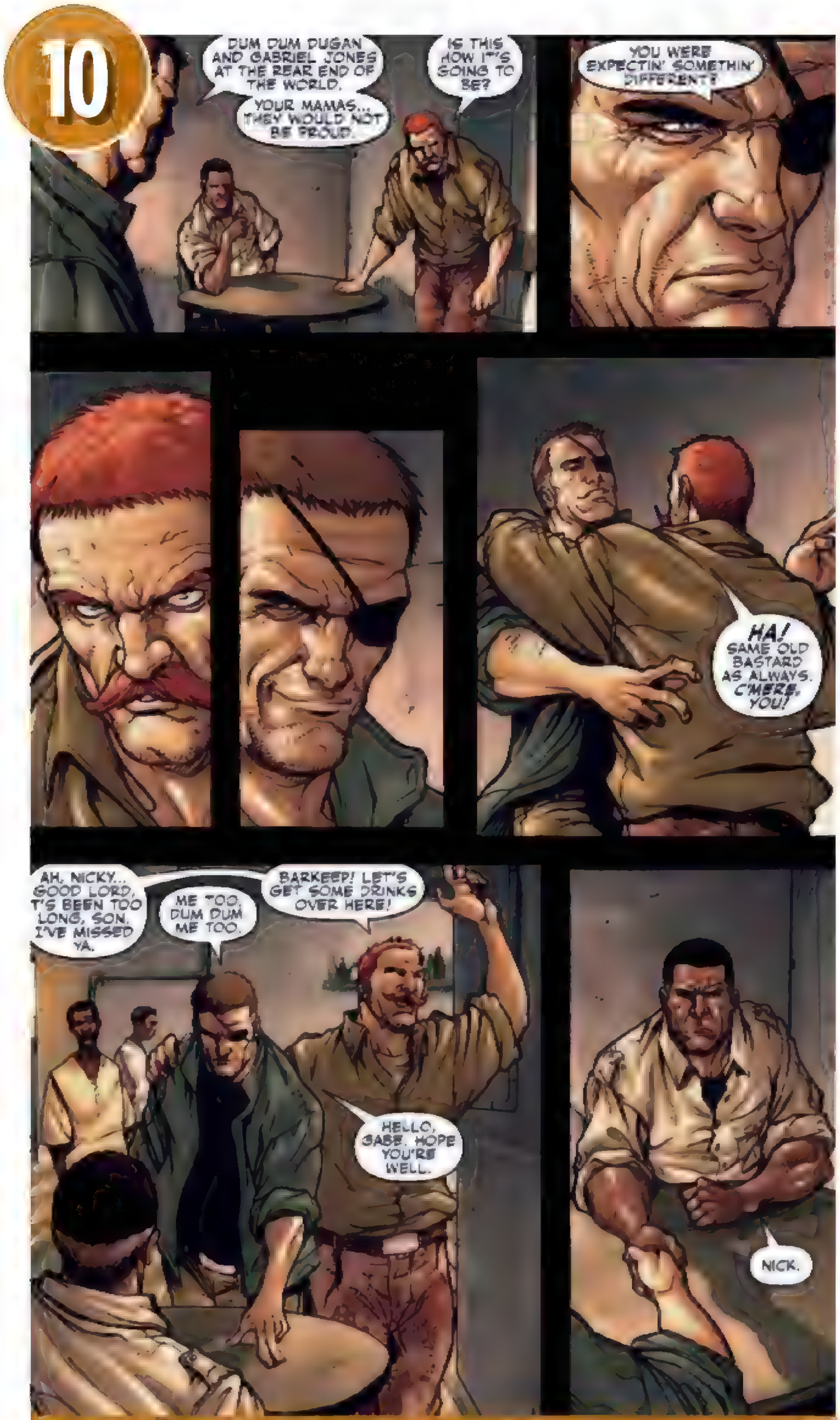

DUM DUM DUGAN AND GABRIEL JONES AT THE REAR END OF THE WORLD.
YOUR MAMAS... THEY WOULD NOT BE PROUD.
IS THIS HOW IT'S GOING TO BE?
YOU WERE EXPECTIN' SOMETHIN' DIFFERENT?
HA! SAME OLD BASTARD AS ALWAYS. C'MERE, YOU!
AH, NICKY... GOOD LORD, IT'S BEEN TOO LONG, SON. I'VE MISSED YA.
ME TOO, DUM DUM ME TOO.
BARKEEP! LET'S GET SOME DRINKS OVER HERE!
HELLO, GABE. HOPE YOU'RE WELL.
NICK.

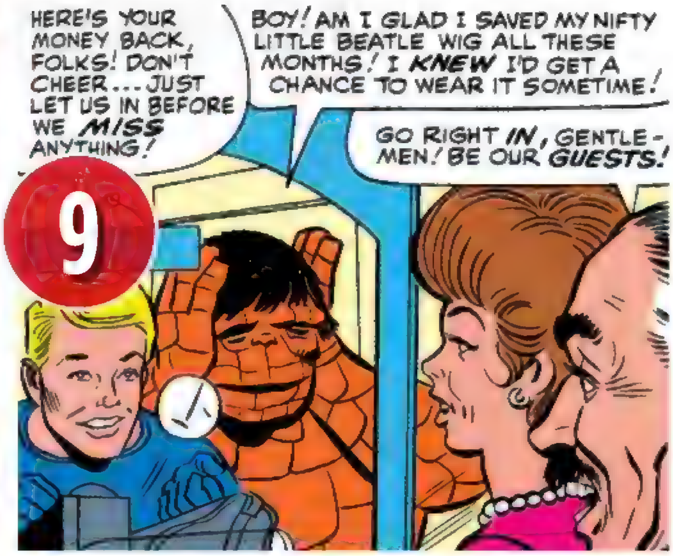
NICK FURY & DUM DUM DUGAN

Many friendships do well to survive a year; Nick Fury and "Dum Dum" Dugan have been hanging out together since World War II, first as key members of a behind-enemy-lines military unit in *Sgt Fury And His Howling Commandos*, then as the head of superspy agency SHIELD and his trusted deputy.

Be it Nazis or HYDRA, the distinctive pair – Fury with his eye patch, hulking ex-circus strongman Dum Dum with his moustache and bowler hat – have been kicking ass side-by-side ever since, occasionally apart (Dum Dum's adventures trying to contain Godzilla in the late '70s were largely Fury-free) but mostly with this gruff, blue-collar human brick-wall one step behind the proactive Fury, Patrick Harper to Nick's Richard Sharpe.

Occasional stories have seen the pair at odds with other SHIELD big wigs – Tony Stark, Maria Hill – but the biggest question over their service is just how they've remained so relatively young and sprightly all these years since WW2. Okay, so Fury has his ageing-arresting "Infinity Formula" drug cheat solution, but Dum Dum has often been depicted as drug-free, and just dying his hair. (He's perhaps the best advert for Hair Club For Men ever seen.)

9


HERE'S YOUR MONEY BACK, FOLKS! DON'T CHEER... JUST LET US IN BEFORE WE MISS ANYTHING!
BOY! AM I GLAD I SAVED MY NIFTY LITTLE BEATLE WIG ALL THESE MONTHS! I KNEW I'D GET A CHANCE TO WEAR IT SOMETIME!
GO RIGHT IN, GENTLEMEN! BE OUR GUESTS!

THE THING & THE HUMAN TORCH

The Fantastic Four was always a family, with Ben Grimm the honorary uncle – but he had another role too, as one half of a duelling "sibling" relationship between him and the Human Torch. Ben was always described as family head Reed Richard's best friend, and the bond between the two was clear to see, but his niggling relationship with Johnny Storm was far more dynamic – buildings would be wrecked and doors slammed, sure, but the love there was clear. Ben would even take it on his stoney chin when Johnny married the love of Ben's life, Alicia Masters, acting as best man at their wedding. (Needless to say, it didn't go well.)

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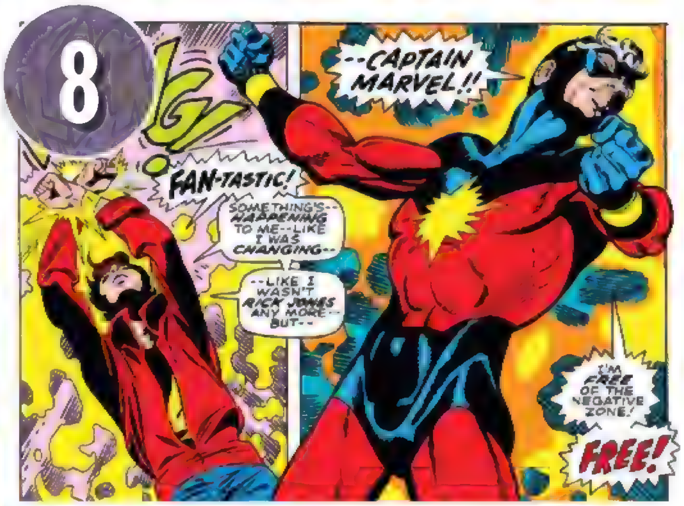
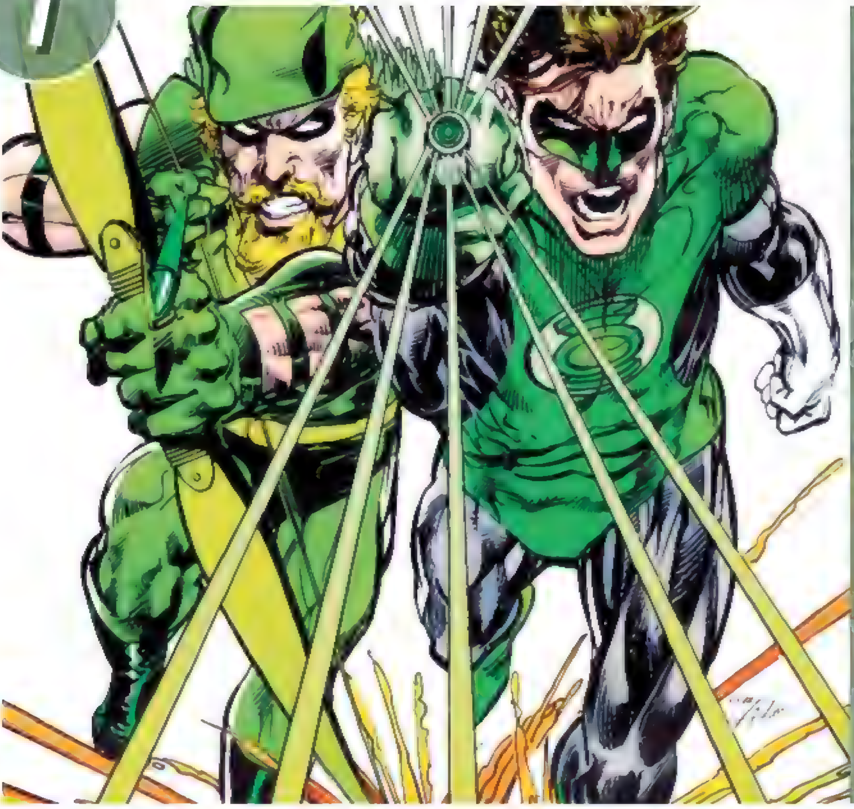

--CAPTAIN MARVEL!!
FAN-TASTIC!
SOMETHING'S HAPPENING TO ME--LIKE I WAS CHANGING--
--LIKE I WASN'T RICK JONES ANY MORE--BUT--
I'M FREE OF THE NEGATIVE ZONE!
FREE!

RICK JONES & CAPTAIN MARVEL

Throughout the '60s, Rick Jones was Marvel's perennial sidekick and since then he's played a major role in numerous Marvel storylines, from *Runaways* to "World War Hulk", but his most telling relationship, the one nearest to being a meeting of equals, was with the rogue Kree warrior Mar-Vell during the classic '70s Jim Starlin run on the *Captain Marvel* book. Now Rick has his own life, as a minor rock star on the road, juggling a complicated love life and a burgeoning career with the need to smash the "Nega-Bands" he wears on his wrists whenever danger threatens, temporarily releasing Marvel from his Negative Zone prison to, you know, save the Earth and such. Mar-Vell and Rick rarely meet, therefore – when Marv is on Earth, Rick is in the Neg Zone and vice versa – but they share a psychic bond, each commenting on the other's actions on Earth, a Greek Chorus-cum-conscience.

7

GREEN LANTERN & GREEN ARROW

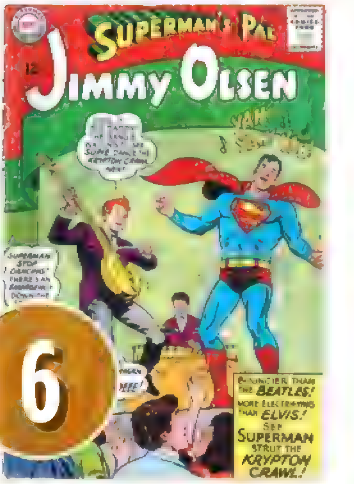


Most buddies enjoy each other's company, but in the classic road-movie buddy book that was the *Green Lantern-Green Arrow* of the early '70s – Dennis O'Neil and Neal Adams's attempt to outdo Marvel in terms of gritty, "relevant" realism within a superhero book – rather less fun was had. Here was lusty, big-mouthed, goatee-sporting counter-culture radical Oliver Queen (who'd been himself so white-bread in all earlier depictions) lecturing a hand-wringing establishment-figure Hal Jordan on the inequalities of America – drugs use, racism, corruption, all that – as the pair bounded from one dragged-from-the-headlines scenario to another. It didn't sell particularly well – the title was cancelled in 1972 – but critical reaction was euphoric, and the shadow it cast was immense.

An important book, then, but the friendship it told of was a strange one: the knowing, socially aware, self-righteous Arrow bashing his guilty space cop pal over the head for issue after issue. It was totally unfair – why should GL, whose beat was the stars, keeping Earth safe, be held responsible for relatively small-beer (on a cosmic scale) social injustice? – but it was a book that revolved around the relationship of two guys nonetheless; forget the weird mix of "reality" and superhero fantasy, it was the characters that mattered.

6

SUPERMAN & JIMMY OLSEN



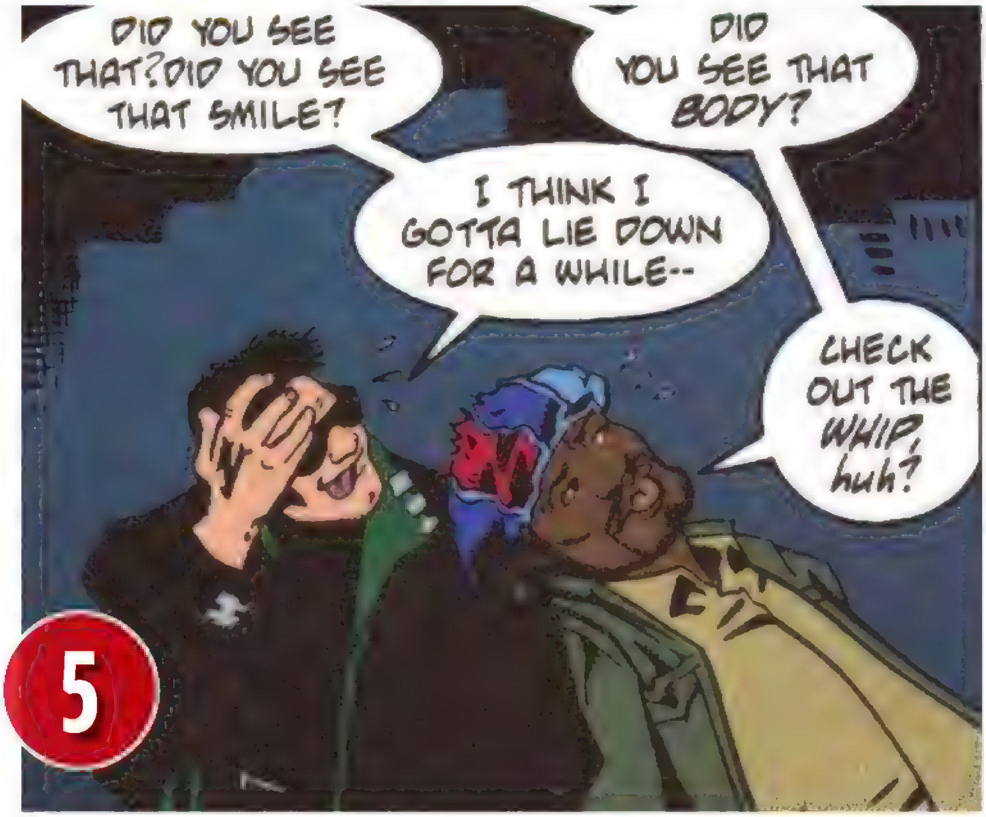
SUPERMAN'S PAL
JIMMY OLSEN
BOUNCIER THAN THE BEATLES! MORE ELECTRIFYING THAN ELVIS! SEE SUPERMAN STRUT THE KRYPTON CRAWL!

But Jimmy Olsen is a sidekick, you say! Well, sort of, we'd answer – but he's also a very special case. Did Bucky or Robin have their own title, as Jimmy did for 20 years, from 1954 to 1974? Did other sidekicks gain their own superpowers constantly – a wolfman, a human porcupine and the notorious giant turtle-boy being three of the more memorable instances – or briefly marry Supergirl? Or first introduce a menace as diabolical as the mighty Darkseid of Apokolips, as Jimmy did in *Superman's Pal, Jimmy Olsen* #134? Indeed not!

Olsen – perky, red-haired, bow-tie sporting cub-reporter pal of Clark Kent on *The Daily Planet* – was first introduced into the Superman mythos in *Action Comics* #6 (November 1938), but gained a personality on the radio show two years later, and really became a staple of the comics in the early '50s, following actor Jack Larson's bubbly performance on the smash-hit TV show *The Adventures of Superman*, opposite star George Reeves.

Though initially useful mainly as someone for Superman to talk to (as Robin had been for Batman, of course), Jimmy soon developed a life of his own. An ingenious, trouble-prone, highly dedicated undercover reporter (dressing as a woman was one surprisingly effective tactic he employed more than once), Jimmy's knack for getting into trouble encouraged Superman to give him a signal watch, so he could call for help whenever needed. Naturally, he needed it plenty.

5



DID YOU SEE THAT? DID YOU SEE THAT SMILE?
DID YOU SEE THAT BODY?
I THINK I GOTTA LIE DOWN FOR A WHILE--
CHECK OUT THE WHIP, huh?

TOMMY MONAGHAN & NATT "THE HATT" WALLS

In *Hitman*, smirking ex-Marine Tommy Monaghan is a minor Gotham City contract killer with low-level superpowers – chiefly X-ray vision and mild telepathy – who specialises in tackling demons and superhumans; most of the time, however, he hangs out with his cheery loser mates in a grotty pub. His best pal is Natt, a slightly rotund ex-Detroit gangbanger. From such unpromising beginnings grew one of DC's most lovable comics of the past 20 years, and at the heart of it was teasing, bullshitting male friendship; when the pair share one last beer at Noonan's Bar before being cut down in a hail of bullets, it's the comic medium's answer to Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid – and just as heartbreaking. »

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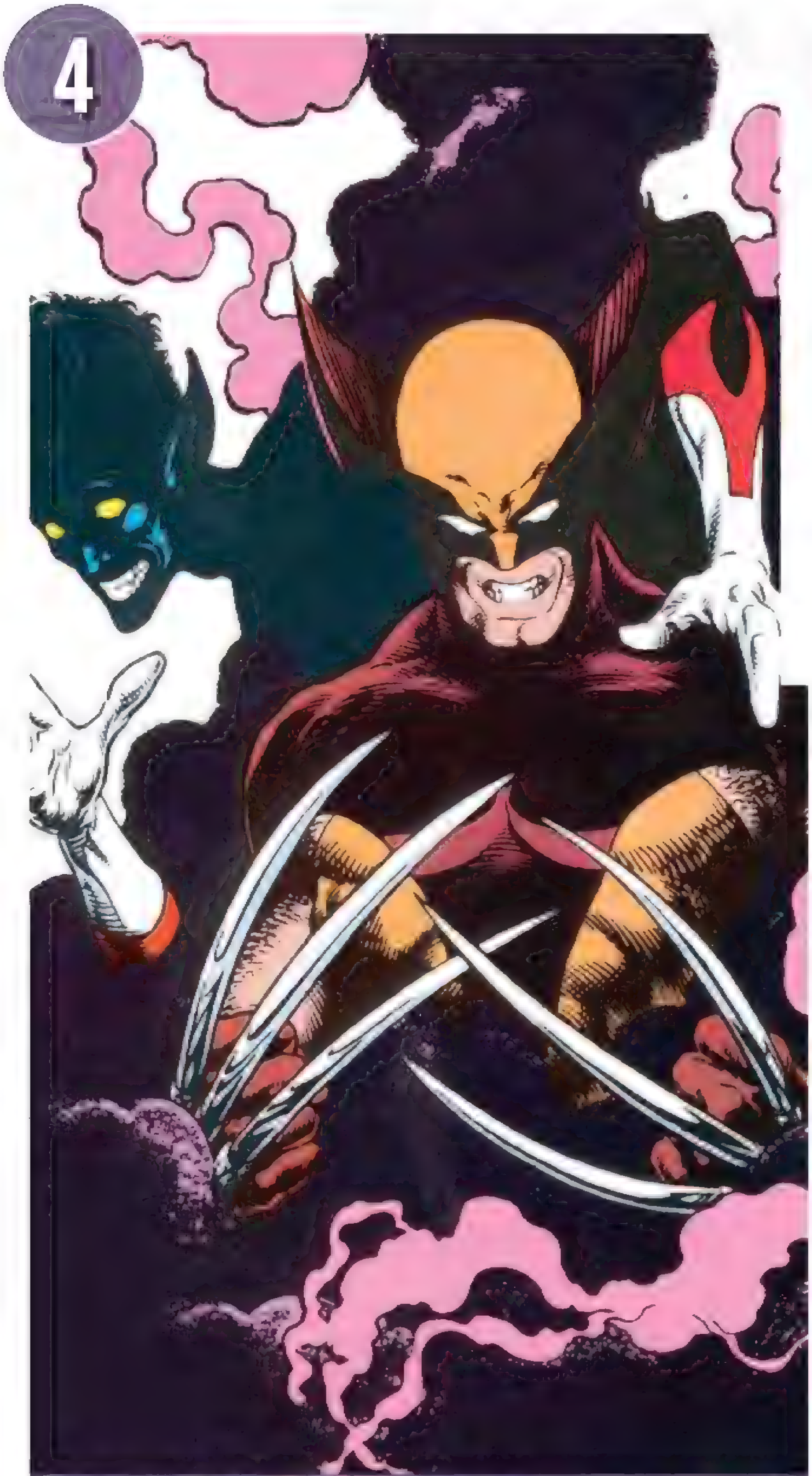
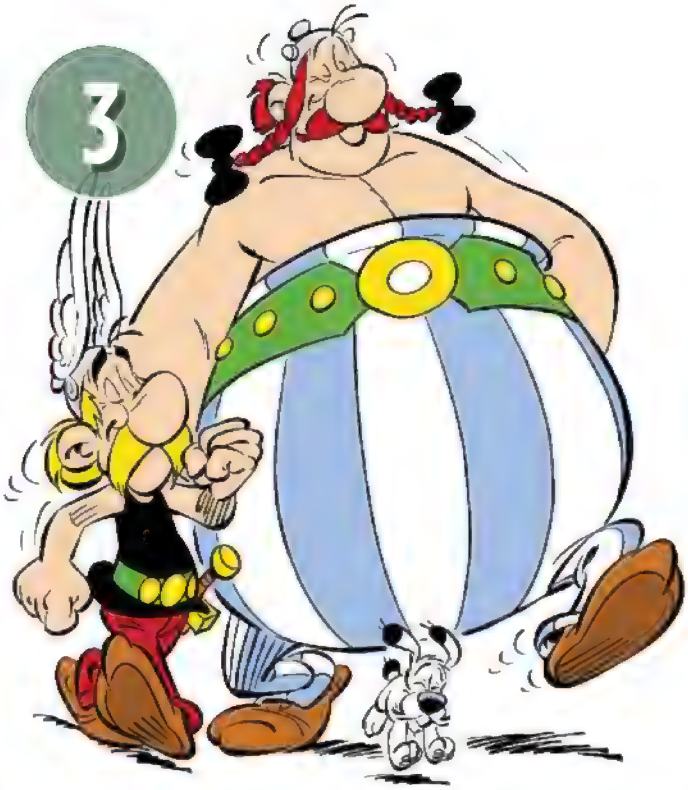


WOLVERINE & NIGHTCRAWLER

Chris Claremont always seemed to care about his girl characters more than the boys in his classic, extended *X-Men* run, but there's was room for bromance too – most notably with drinking buddies Logan and "fuzzy elf" Kurt Wagner, who were forever going out for "suds" and chilling together, two cocky, high-achieving monsters with hearts of gold. In *Uncanny X-Men* #95 they first team-up to punch out Ape-Man of the Ani-Men in unison, but before long Logan's persuading Kurt to stop hiding his (semi-demonic) face from the general public, and they're holidaying in Canada together. There's a degree of opposites attract going on here – the "misfit" Nightcrawler is the gentler soul on the surface – and their deep philosophical discussions over mountains of beer cans were usually the highlights of any issue they appeared in.

3



ASTERIX & OBELIX

For those of us who came to comics through English translations of the great Franco-Belgian comics strips – principally, *Tintin* and *Asterix* – there's no greater buddy duo than the tiny, indomitable Gaul and his huge, dopey pal Obelix, scourge of pirates, Roman legionaries and bullies of every stripe across occupied France, Europe and beyond. Asterix is cunning and relatively sensible, Obelix kind-hearted, clumsy and eternally hungry – though quick to anger at any suggestion that he might, just possibly, be "fat". Both fall for women continually, but it's a childish sort of puppy love, and never gets in the way of the bond between our heroes – though they fall out often, they make up just as swiftly, the politics of the playground given over-sized four-colour life.

2

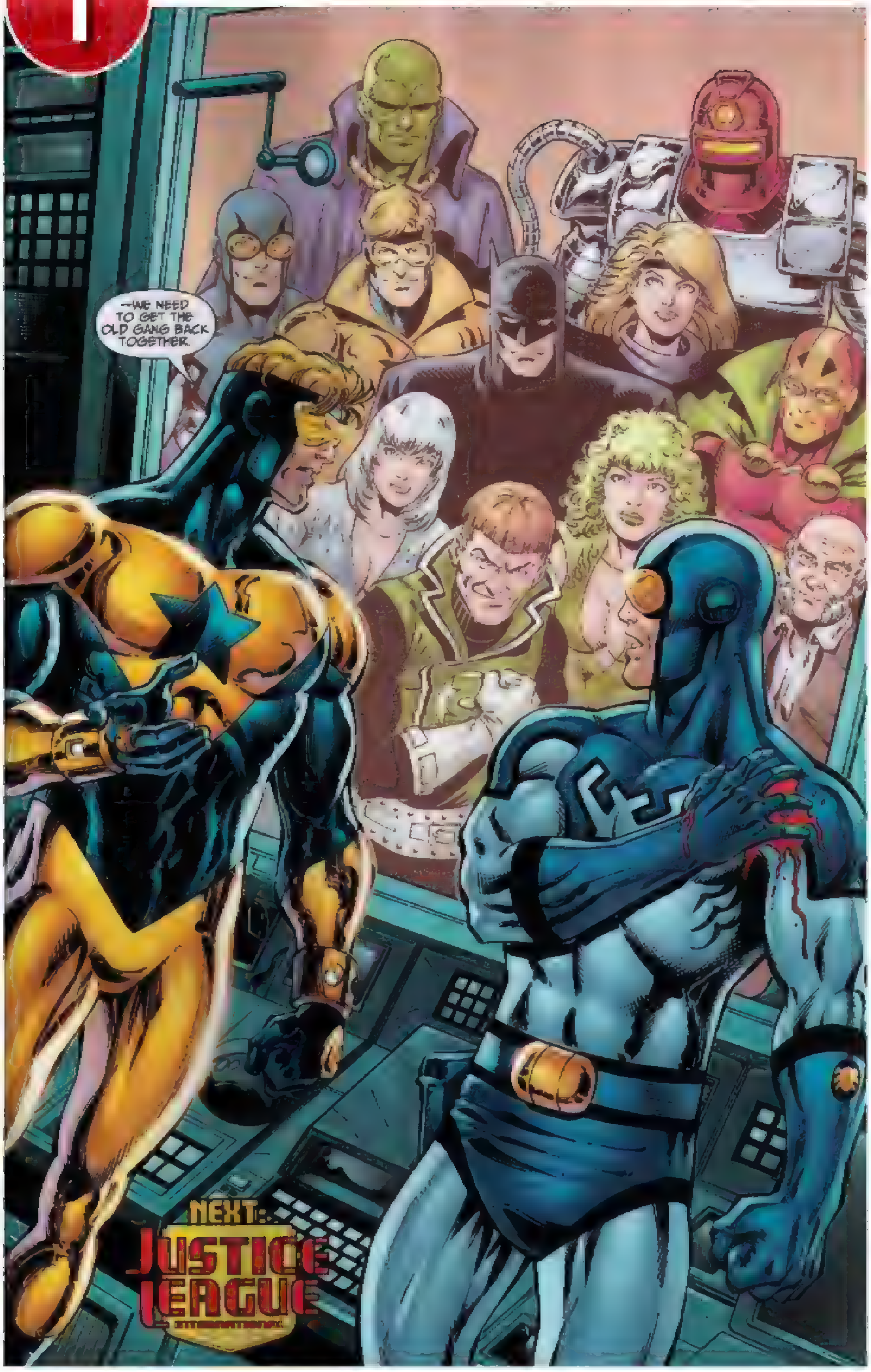
POWER MAN & IRON FIST

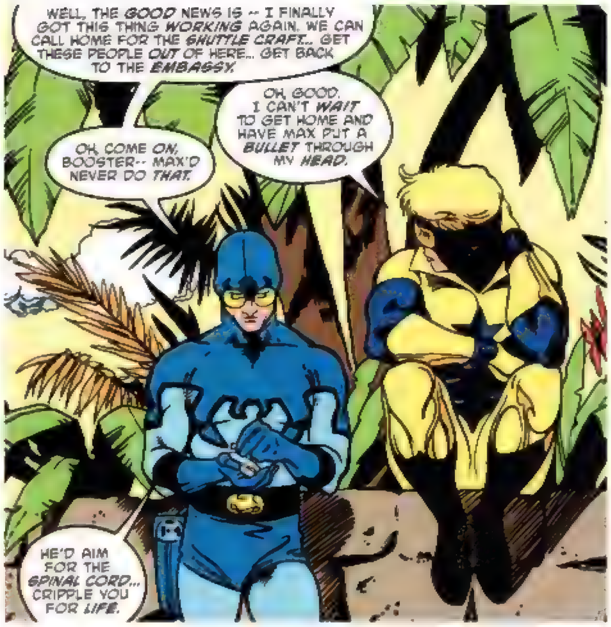
MARVEL ALL-COLOUR COMICS
12p
50
BEGINNING: A NEW ERA OF GREATNESS!
POWER MAN AND IRON FIST
50

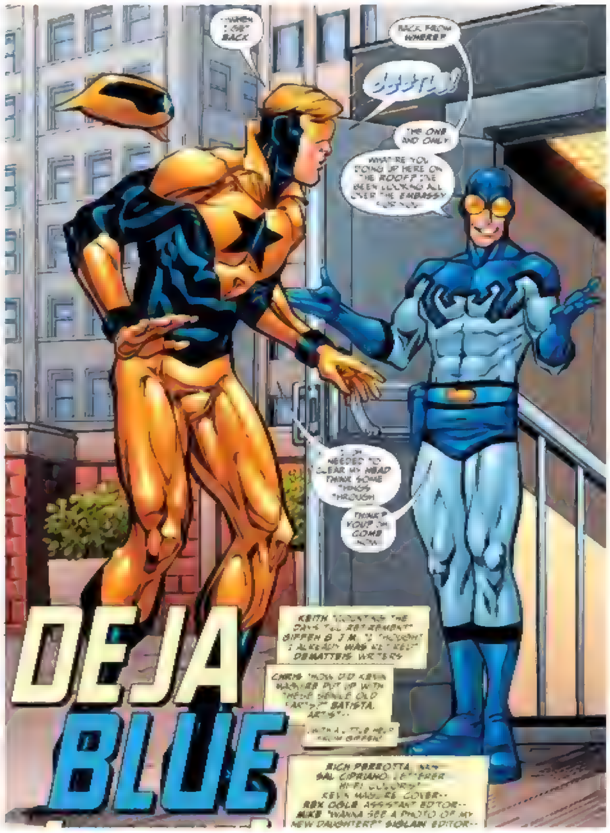
It shouldn't have worked – to shore up the failing Luke Cage title, originally called *Hero For Hire* and later *Power Man*, it was combined with the already-closed *Iron Fist* from #50 onwards, the book now becoming *Power Man And Iron Fist*, and lasting another 75 issues in this form, until an across-Marvel cull wiped it out in the '80s. Cage was a gruff black ex-con, with steel-hard skin and super-strength; Iron Fist was Danny Rand, a nice white kid brought up in a hidden city with super-kung fu skills. That they had little in common was part of the series' charm, but soon the fact that these guys were pals became the core point of the strip – one uptight and controlled, the other loud and crude, a street-level superhero Odd Couple whose relationship became more functional, nuanced and intriguing as the book went on.

Power Man And Iron Fist was never about the action sequences, but remains extremely fondly remembered for other qualities: chiefly, the warmth and interaction between the two mismatched leads. Despite both characters (but Power Man particularly) having extensive careers since then, the calls for them to return as a regular pairing rarely die down.

1


—WE NEED TO GET THE OLD GANG BACK TOGETHER
NEXT: JUSTICE LEAGUE INTERNATIONAL


WELL, THE GOOD NEWS IS -- I FINALLY GOT THIS THING WORKING AGAIN. WE CAN CALL HOME FOR THE SHUTTLE CRAFT... GET THESE PEOPLE OUT OF HERE... GET BACK TO THE EMBASSY.
OH, GOOD. I CAN'T WAIT TO GET HOME AND HAVE MAX PUT A BULLET THROUGH MY HEAD.
OH, COME ON, BOOSTER-- MAX'D NEVER DO THAT.
HE'D AIM FOR THE SPINAL CORD... CRIPPLE YOU FOR LIFE.


BACK FROM WHERE?
THE ONE AND ONLY
DEJA BLUE

BOOSTER GOLD & BLUE BEETLE

Like many of the top pairings in this list, Booster Gold and Blue Beetle were never designed to be team-mates, or even friends, but got there anyway – to the point where it's now hard to imagine the one without the other.

Booster Gold was the first major new character incorporated into the DC Universe post the line-wide reboot that was *Crisis On Infinite Earths*. A big-headed glory-hound from the future, he comes to the past – our era – with no superpowers, but a ton of high-tech equipment (wrist-blasters, a super-strength power suit, a Legion of Super-Heroes flight ring) and knowledge of "historic'"events. His story was that of a showboating idiot who gradually becomes a true hero almost despite himself.

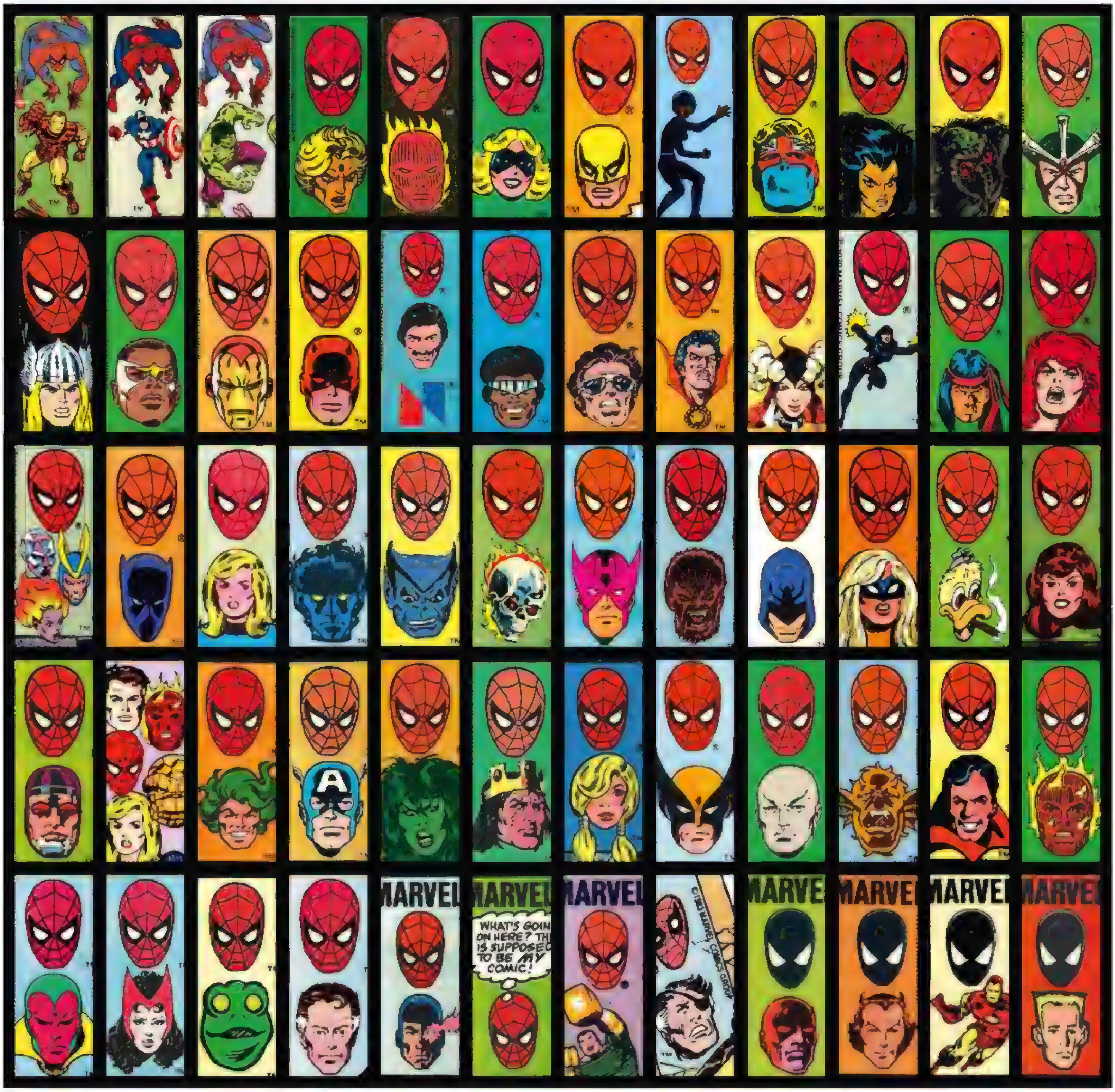
Blue Beetle, meanwhile, was an old Charlton Comics hero created by Steve Ditko in 1966 – he was the chief model for Nite Owl in *Watchmen* – with some Spider-Man similarities: chiefly a bug-theme, acrobatic powers and a smart-arse personality, though a notable lack of angst.

Acquired by DC in the '80s and incorporated into its universe post-*Crisis*, he had his own strip for a couple of years but gained more recognition as a member of Justice League International, the light-hearted, Batman-led incarnation of the team that flourished under writers Keith Giffen and JM DeMatteis in the late '80s. Booster Gold was also a member, and it's there that the "Blue and Gold" team began.

If ever two heroes were built for buddy comedy it was these guys: put upon, suffering constant money worries and both deeply flawed – Beetle overweight for a while, Booster always a bit of a dick – but highly endearing as a team.

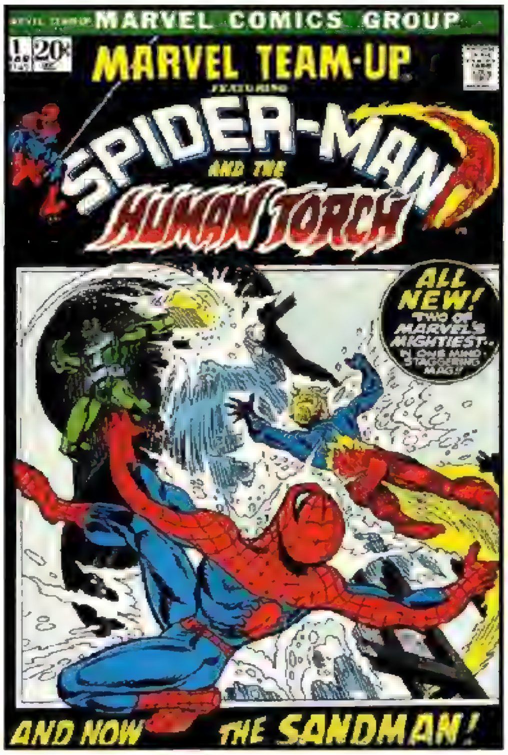
Briefly quite a big player in the New 52, Booster has since (largely) disappeared – but all signs point to his story not being over quite yet, and that the feckless, avaricious Booster Gold is more important than anyone's yet aware.

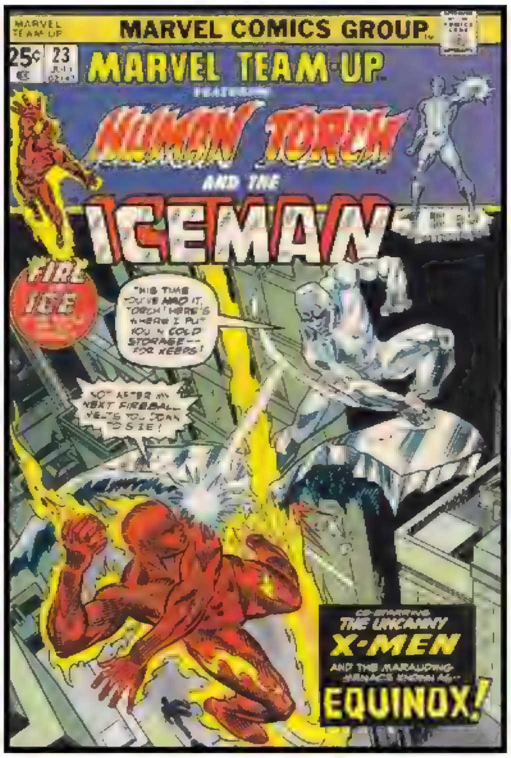
It's possible his real moment of glory is yet to come then, but for most comic readers it's already happened: the JLI years, where Booster was his most greedy, useless and full of himself, Beetle at his most hapless and wisecracking, and friendship shone from every panel.

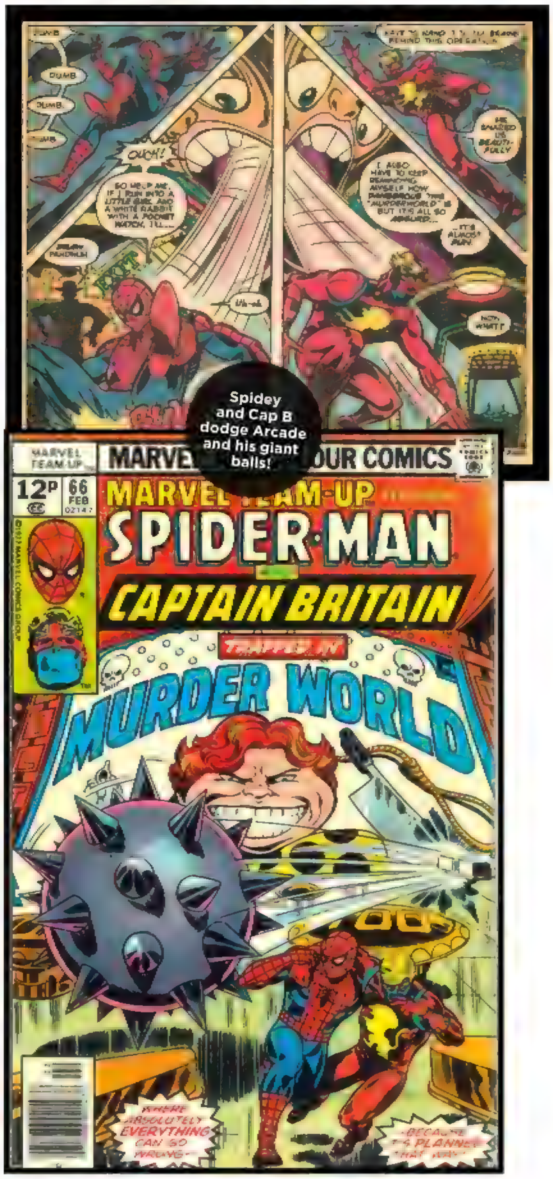

MARVEL
MARVEL
MARVEL
MARVEL
MARVEL
MARVEL
MARVEL
WHAT'S GOIN ON HERE? TH IS SUPPOSEC TO BE MY COMIC!

PETER'S FRIENDS

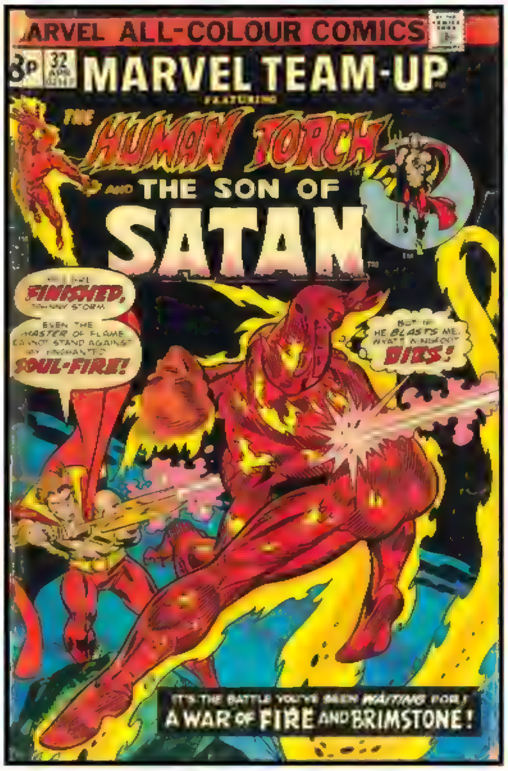
In the early '70s, Marvel was awash with new comics, but few are as well-remembered as *Marvel Team-Up*, the "Spider-Man-and-His-Amazing-Friends" title that acted as the company's gateway drug... **By Matt Bielby**

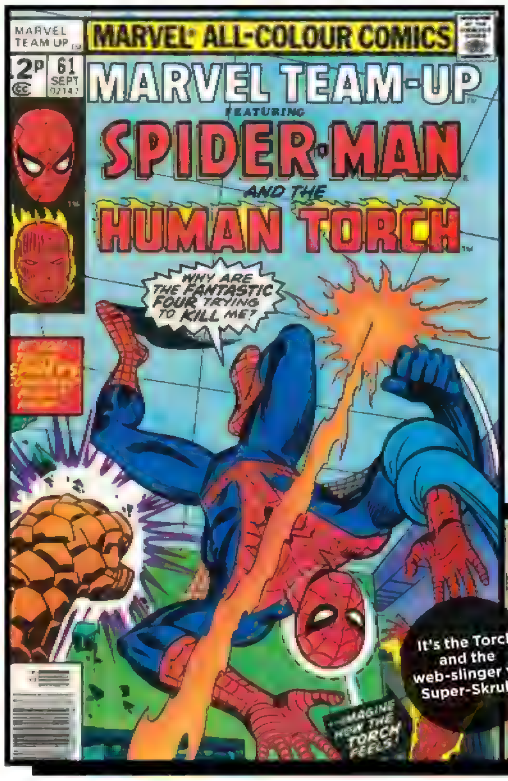

MARVEL COMICS GROUP
1 20¢
MARVEL TEAM-UP
FEATURING
SPIDER-MAN
AND THE
HUMAN TORCH
ALL NEW! TWO OF MARVEL'S MIGHTIEST — IN ONE MIND-STAGGERING MAG!
AND NOW THE SANDMAN!


MARVEL COMICS GROUP
25¢ 23
MARVEL TEAM-UP
FEATURING
HUMAN TORCH
AND THE
ICEMAN
FIRE & ICE
CO-STARRING THE UNCANNY X-MEN
AND THE MARAUDING MENACE KNOWN AS — EQUINOX!


DUMB
DUMB
DUMB
OUCH!
SO HELP ME, IF I RUN INTO A LITTLE GIRL AND A WHITE RABBIT WITH A POCKET WATCH, I'LL...
Uh-oh
HE SMASHED US BEAUTIFULLY
I ALSO HAVE TO KEEP REMINDING MYSELF HOW DANGEROUS THIS "MURDERWORLD" IS BUT IT'S ALL SO ABSURD...
IT'S ALMOST FUN.
NOW WHAT?
MARVEL TEAM-UP
MARVEL ALL-COLOUR COMICS
12P 66 FEB
MARVEL TEAM-UP
SPIDER-MAN
CAPTAIN BRITAIN
TRAPPED IN
MURDER WORLD
WHERE ABSOLUTELY EVERYTHING CAN GO WRONG —
— BECAUSE IT'S PLANNED THAT WAY!

Spidey and Cap B dodge Arcade and his giant balls!


MARVEL ALL-COLOUR COMICS
8P 32
MARVEL TEAM-UP
FEATURING
THE HUMAN TORCH
AND THE SON OF SATAN
FINISHED, JOHNNY STORM
EVEN THE MASTER OF FLAME CANNOT STAND AGAINST MY ENCHANTED SOUL-FIRE!
BUT IF HE BLASTS ME, WYATT WINGFOOT BITES!
IT'S THE BATTLE YOU'VE BEEN WAITING FOR! A WAR OF FIRE AND BRIMSTONE!


MARVEL TEAM-UP
MARVEL ALL-COLOUR COMICS
2P 61 SEPT
MARVEL TEAM-UP
FEATURING
SPIDER-MAN
AND THE
HUMAN TORCH
WHY ARE THE FANTASTIC FOUR TRYING TO KILL ME?
IMAGINE HOW THE TORCH FEELS!

It's the Torch and the web-slinger vs Super-Skrull!

SO MUCH FOR THAT IDEA. HE RECOVERED AS FAST AS I DID.
YOU LITTLE TWERP. WHAT'S THE BIG IDEA?
IN CASE YOU HADN'T NOTICED, BIG-BRAIN, I JUST SAVED YOUR RED-AN'-BLUE BUTT!
KIND OF YOU
ESPECIALLY AFTER YOU AND THE REST OF THE FANTASTIC FOUR JUST FINISHED USING ME AS A PUNCHING BAG

All images © Marvel

The new spirit abroad at Marvel in the early '70s was announced with a bang, as with everything Stan Lee touched: this would be "Marvel Phase 2".

There were new owners in town – Stan Lee had won his ongoing wrestling match with Martin Goodman for control of the company, and *Conan* was pointing the way. This new, ever-bolder Marvel would do more than just superheroes and those other old DC standbys – war stories, horror, Westerns. Now there could be sci-fi comics and barbarian books, black superheroes headlining their own titles, and more properties aimed at women.

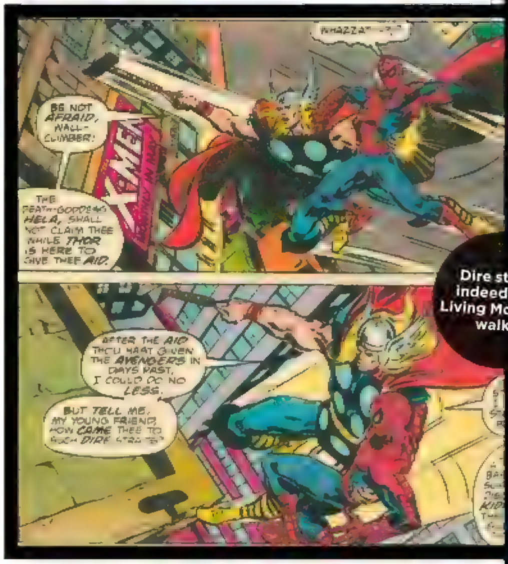
Except, hang on? Where was Stan in all this? Sleek and silver-haired at this point, grinning behind ever-present Aviators, he rather seemed to fancy California and Hollywood right now, not to mention the college town "an evening with…" circuit. Stan had been victorious in the battle for Marvel's soul – every splash page now began with the legend "Stan Lee presents…", like the logo of some old movie mogul – but the man himself was no longer to be seen, at least on the shop floor.

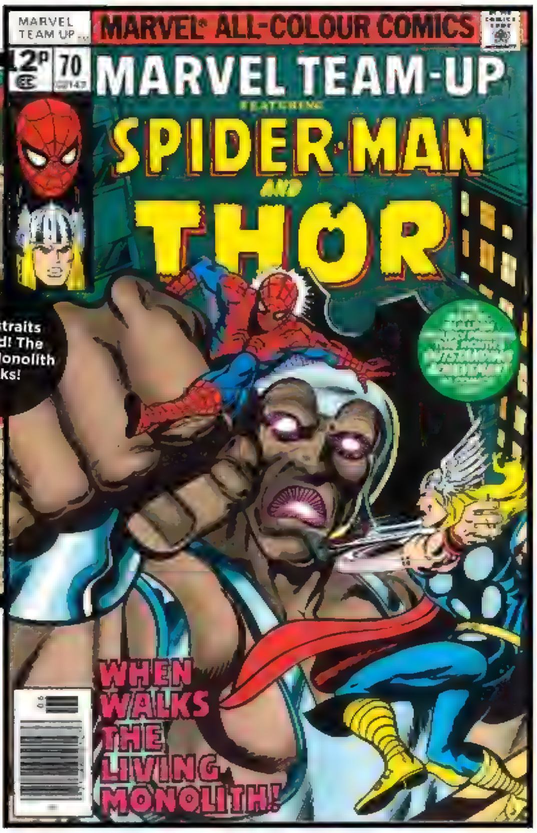
He wasn't writing anything, he wasn't editing anything – to all intents and purposes, and despite all the hullabaloo and flag-waving – he'd upped sticks and disappeared. And so his much-heralded Phase 2 of the Marvel Age of Comics would begin under Roy Thomas's hand.

And it wasn't to be easy. Marvel was suddenly short-staffed, and in desperate need of new creators, new material. And to make it yet more complicated, the last days of the Lee/Goodman bouts had seen the launch of a whole raft of new *Showcase*-style comics, based on the format of that old DC title. These were "try-out" books, which tested the waters for an entire new series every few issues; they had such on-the-nose names as *Marvel Premiere*, *Marvel Spotlight* and *Marvel Feature*. And they ate through ideas voraciously.

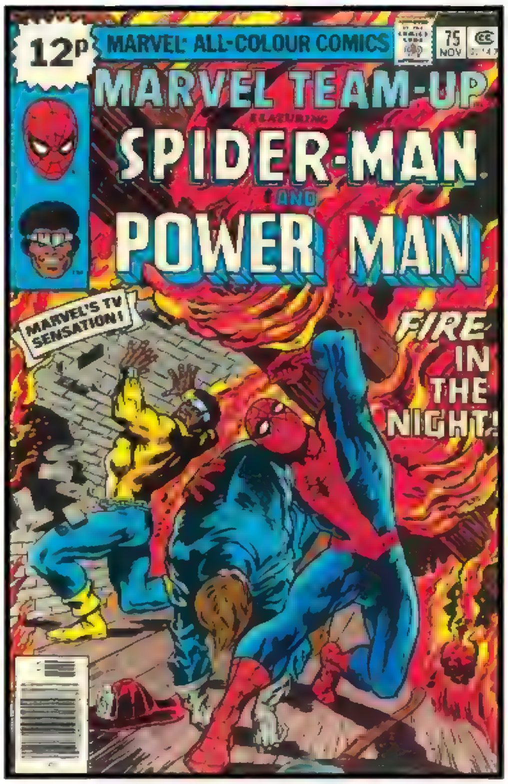
And then there were the two team-up books: *Marvel Team-Up* – launched in early 1972 – and »

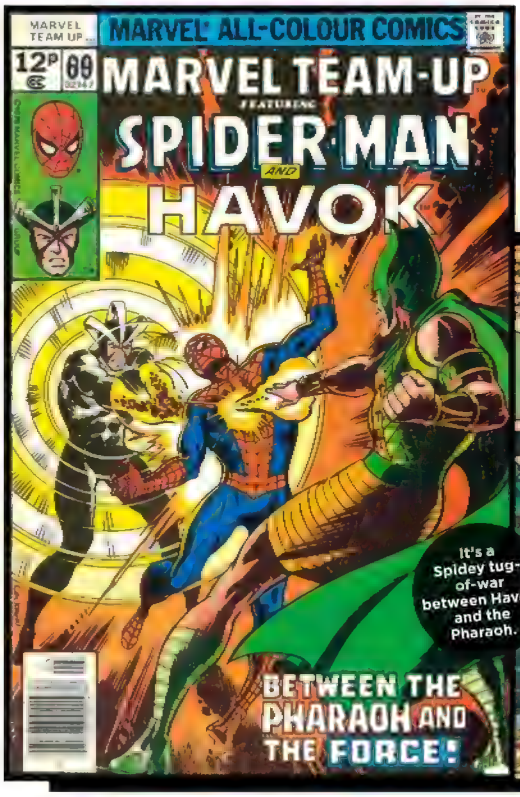
> **“Like a good chat show host, Peter Parker was our easy, unthreatening way into the most bizarre of worlds”**


WHAZZA--?
BE NOT AFRAID, WALL-CLIMBER!
THE DEATH-GODDESS HELA, SHALL NOT CLAIM THEE WHILE THOR IS HERE TO GIVE THEE AID.
AFTER THE AID THOU HAST GIVEN THE AVENGERS IN DAYS PAST, I COULD DO NO LESS.
BUT TELL ME, MY YOUNG FRIEND: HOW CAME THEE TO SUCH DIRE STRAITS?

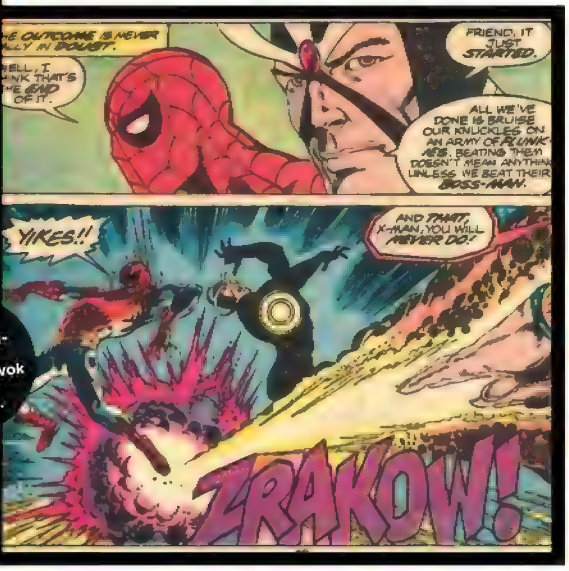

MARVEL TEAM UP
MARVEL ALL-COLOUR COMICS
12p 70
MARVEL TEAM-UP
FEATURING
SPIDER-MAN
AND
THOR
WHEN WALKS THE LIVING MONOLITH!

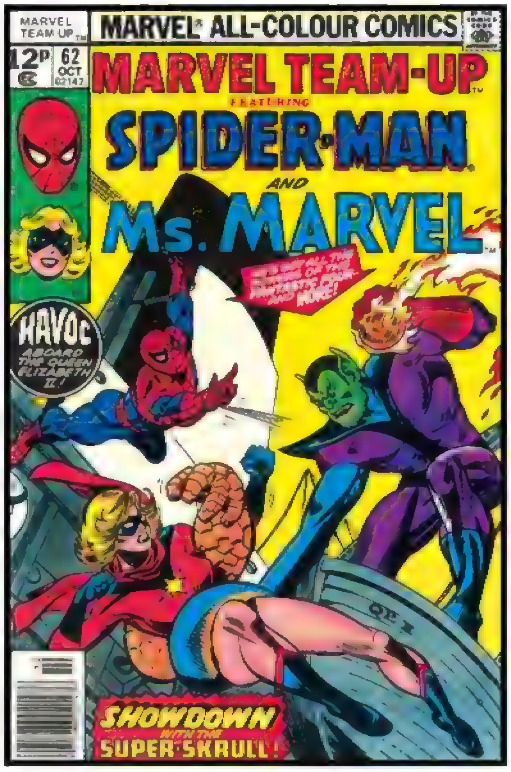
Dire straits indeed! The Living Monolith walks!


12p
MARVEL ALL-COLOUR COMICS
75 NOV
MARVEL TEAM-UP
FEATURING
SPIDER-MAN
AND
POWER MAN
MARVEL'S TV SENSATION!
FIRE IN THE NIGHT!


MARVEL TEAM UP
MARVEL ALL-COLOUR COMICS
12p 69
MARVEL TEAM-UP
FEATURING
SPIDER-MAN
AND
HAVOK
BETWEEN THE PHARAOH AND THE FORCE!

It's a Spidey tug-of-war between Havok and the Pharaoh.


THE OUTCOME IS NEVER REALLY IN DOUBT.
WELL, I THINK THAT'S THE END OF IT.
FRIEND, IT JUST STARTED.
ALL WE'VE DONE IS BRUISE OUR KNUCKLES ON AN ARMY OF FLUNKIES. BEATING THEM DOESN'T MEAN ANYTHING UNLESS WE BEAT THEIR BOSS-MAN.
YIKES!!
AND THAT, X-MAN, YOU WILL NEVER DO!
ZRAKOW!


MARVEL TEAM UP
MARVEL ALL-COLOUR COMICS
12p 62 OCT
MARVEL TEAM-UP
FEATURING
SPIDER-MAN
AND
Ms. MARVEL
HAVOC ABOARD THE QUEEN ELIZABETH II!
SHOWDOWN WITH THE SUPER-SKRULL!

soon *Marvel Two-in-One* (begun two years later). Both based on DC's be-buddies-with-Batman book *The Brave And The Bold*, they paired Spider-Man (in *Team-Up*) and the Thing (in *Two-in-One*) with a different hero every issue. Quite often a new creative team was needed each time too.

This was not a great period for Marvel in terms of ultimate quality, perhaps – too many rookie creators, too much ambition, too little editorial control, and bags of experimentation that often veered off into self-indulgence – but damn, was it exciting. *The Defenders* might have been the biggest new hit of this period, but *Marvel Team-Up* was the book that defined it – heaving with fan service, bursting at the seams with brand new characters, and a revolving door as far as who would be writing and drawing it each issue was concerned.

And every door revolved: not even Spidey was guaranteed a slot each issue. For a brief period, Marvel had the FF's Johnny Storm, the Human Torch, act as anchor for *MTU*. Truth to tell, Johnny was perfectly well suited to the task, but it didn't last long – and the reason was obvious. Key to the success of *Team-Up* was that it had always been, effectively, a second Spider-Man title (we'll ignore the reprint-only *Marvel Tales* of the era, running old Ditko stories and the like) in the days when such things were anything but de rigueur. And in the early '70s, Spidey was the biggest noise in town.

Effectively, *Marvel Team-Up* was to become Marvel's gateway drug, and as such the book soon developed as many enemies as it did supporters in fandom. On the one hand, this was a clear case of crass commercialism, a book with a simplistic, childish feel, and a painfully obvious way to prop up failing characters and trial new ones; by buying it, we were paying for the privilege of being Marvel's research department!

On the other hand: lots of superhero for your 35c! A solid example of the fun to be had from comics! And more Spidey!

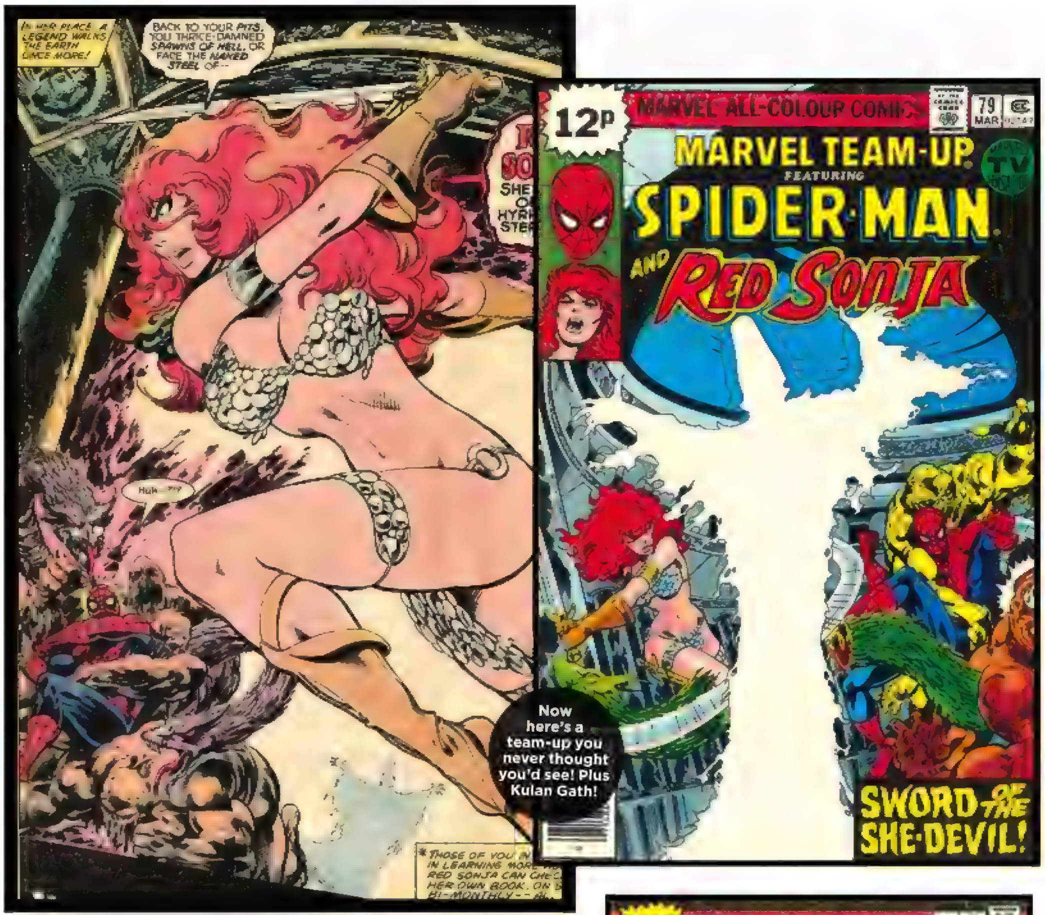
Of course, Spider-Man wasn't just a big draw, but such an everyman ("the hero who could be you", as they kept reminding us) that it's hard to imagine anyone else making quite such an effective "host" here. (The Thing actually brought some of the same qualities to *Two-in-One*: both grounded their books in a grubby New York of snow and sniffles and Yancy Street hoodlums.) Like a good chat show host, Peter Parker was our easy, unthreatening way into the most bizarre of worlds.

This being the case, Spidey feels exactly the same bemusement as we do when faced with a ginger-haired barbarian lady (Red Sonja in *MTU* #79), or watching gob-smacked as a Greek man-god tows a stolen Manhattan back into place (Hercules in *MTU* #28) – two of the most memorable issues of *MTU*, for very different reasons, with the Herc tale justly celebrated as one of Marvel's silliest.

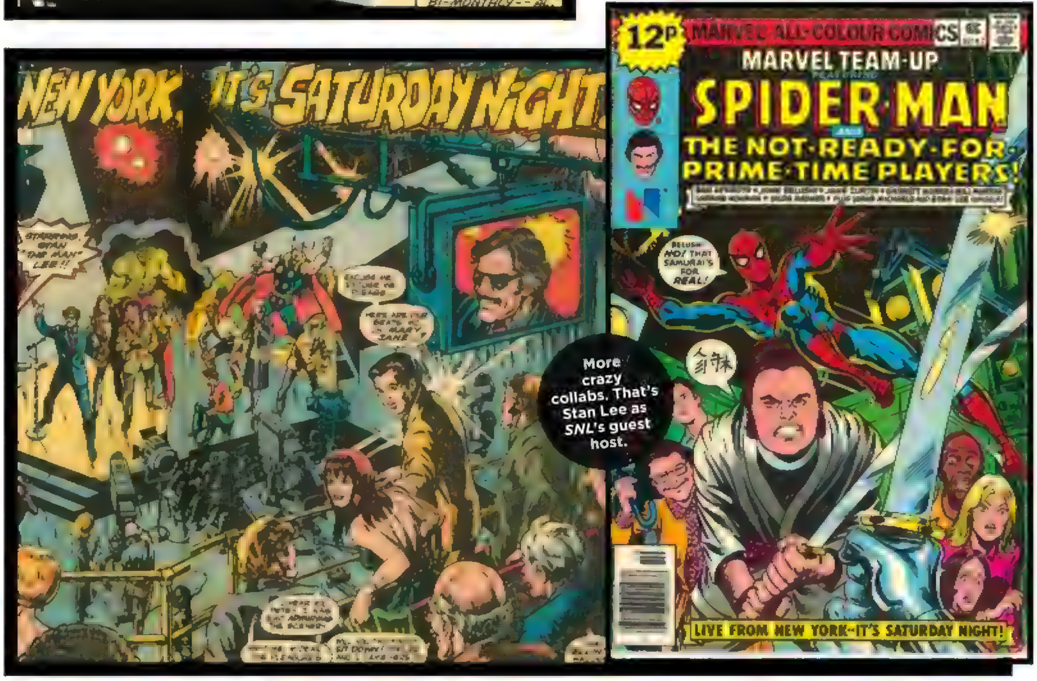
AMAZING STORIES

The first three *Marvel Team-Ups* had seen Spidey meet up with the Torch for a rolling adventure that took in the Sandman, his Frightful Four pals, Annihilus and even Morbius the Living Vampire, and Johnny Storm would be back for issues #10 and then #18, an adventure Spidey sat out as the Torch and the Hulk took on an old FF villain, Blastaar.

It was at this point that Johnny actually got that regular gig on *MTU* we mentioned earlier for a while, subbing for Spidey every three issues or so for maybe a year and a half before Peter Parker


In her place, a legend walks the Earth once more!
Back to your pits, you thrice-damned spawns of Hell, or face the naked steel of--
12p
MARVEL ALL-COLOUR COMICS
79
MAR
MARVEL TEAM-UP
FEATURING
SPIDER-MAN
AND
RED SONJA
SWORD-OF-THE SHE-DEVIL!
*Those of you in... in learning more... Red Sonja can check her own book, on sale bi-monthly

Now here's a team-up you never thought you'd see! Plus Kulan Gath!


NEW YORK, IT'S SATURDAY NIGHT!
Starring Stan "The Man" Lee!!
12p
MARVEL ALL-COLOUR COMICS
MARVEL TEAM-UP
FEATURING
SPIDER-MAN
AND
THE NOT-READY-FOR-PRIME-TIME PLAYERS!
Belushi-No! That Samurai's for real!
LIVE FROM NEW YORK-IT'S SATURDAY NIGHT!

More crazy collabs. That's Stan Lee as *SNL*'s guest host.

reasserted his position as regular lead – presumably someone in the Marvel hierarchy had spotted what now seems bleeding obvious, that the Spidey issues were simply selling better.

Not every issue of *Marvel Team-Up* is gold – far from it – but it consistently has its moments, and from the beginning contained much of what made the first decades of the Marvel Universe, and Spider-Man in particular, so charming: the casual, bantering interaction between the heroes, the everyman reaction to weirdness, and the Marvel heroes' inexplicable ability to firmly grasp the wrong end of the stick every. Single. Time.

Oh, make no mistake: *Marvel Team-Up* featured more than its fair share of the company's ludicrous, repetitive "misunderstanding fights", where two good guys follow separate trails towards the real villain, bump into each other and then scrap tooth-and-nail for half the book before realising their mistake, briefly getting captured and finally escaping to tackle the baddie together. (A weak issue of *MTU* is basically that in a nutshell.) But it also featured more than a little of the company's most winning innovation: superhero downtime.

Thus, when – in the title's first storyline – a non-too-proud Spidey swings over to the Baxter Building looking for help against Sandman, but finds only Johnny home, the pair bond and crack wise for a while, two buddies ribbing each other. Oh sure, Sandman escapes – but this time out, at least, his motives seem pretty innocent (he just wanted to wish "Merry Christmas" to his sick mum!), so what's the harm, eh? Johnny caps the issue by blazing a seasonal message across the sky.

That sense of community and unexpected relationships between the Marvel heroes continued: it was in the pages of *MTU*, for instance, that we learned how the Wasp, as an Avenger, has private access to the Fantastic Four's labs when they're out of town. It wasn't a vital thing, nothing we had to know, but it was a nice touch regardless.

Oh sure, *Marvel Team-Up* as a concept has obvious flaws – it rarely stretched beyond telling short, inconsequential tales full of fighting and brouhaha, and when it did try more ambitious arcs it arguably got itself well off-message – but its charm and accessibility redeems it.

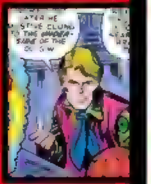
For many, *MTU* offered a good value, generally well-crafted, continuity-light introduction to the riches of the Marvel Universe. What it had going for it was closure, for these were usually two-part or done-in-one stories and if you were the sort of reader (as most British ones were) who couldn't afford many American comics, or couldn't guarantee you'd see the same ones in your local newsagent each month, *MTU* was a perfect

»

SILLY SYMPHONIES

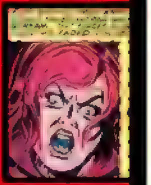
All comics can get dopey, of course. But *MTU* probably went a little doolally more often than most. Here are our five silliest moments…

1. MTU #1: Don't Turn Your Backs!


After he stole clung to the underside of the...

Spidey and the Torch (who wears the craziest hipster outfit for much of the story) are having such a bromance they turn their backs on the Sandman, allowing him to slip away down the drain. Can you say "dereliction of duty"?

2. MTU #8: Hardly Germaine Greer!

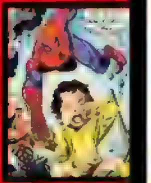


Spidey and the Cat face a militant feminist villain called – subtle! – Man-Killer. (Her real name – Katrina Luisa Van Horn – and her background as an Olympic skier with anger management issues, were hardly more likely.)

3: MTU #23: Flame Off!

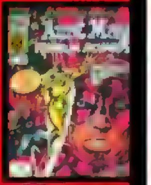
In a classic fire-versus-ice confrontation, Johnny Storm uses one of his flaming lassos (he kept doing this; no one could ever explain how) and Bobby Drake counters by making giant ice-scissors to cut it. Did someone think they were writing Green Lantern here?

4. MTU #28: Hercules Unbound!

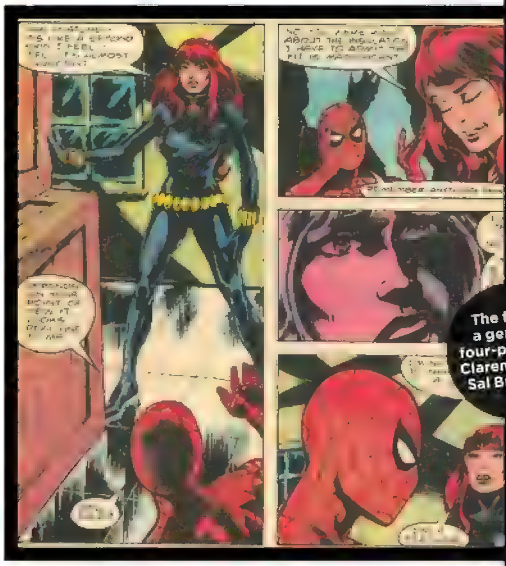


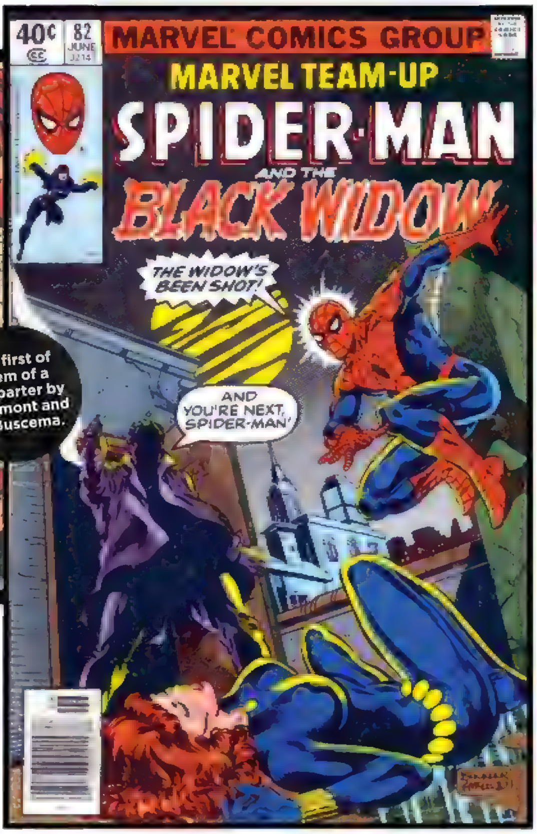
Manhattan Island is depicted as some sort of giant lily-pad which can be towed out to sea by cheeky robots, then back again by Greek strongmen pulling on chains. Well, Hercules is a demi-god…

5. MTU #137: Assistant Editor's Month!

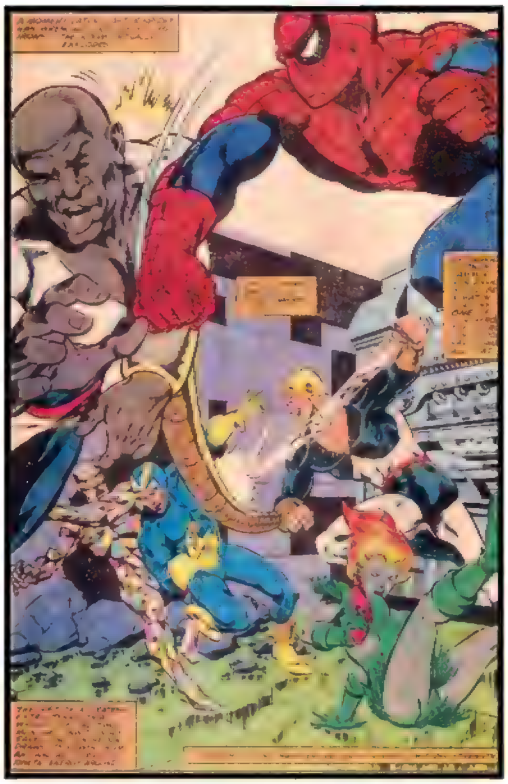


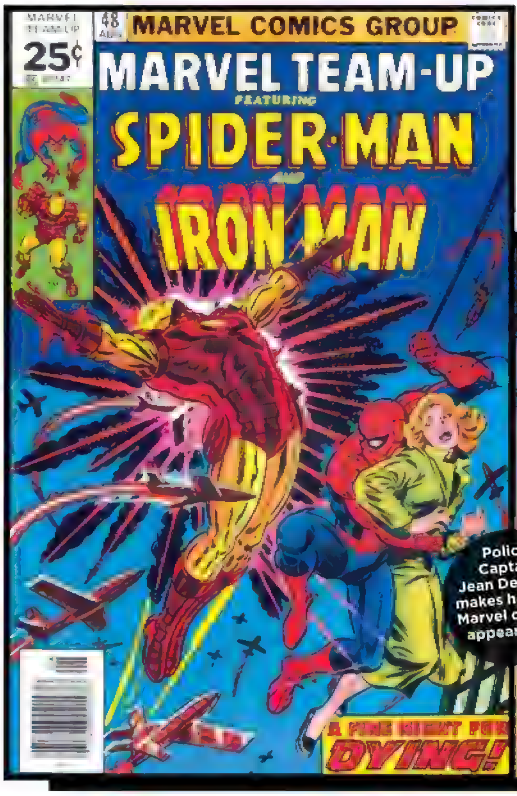
Sure, it was meant to be stupid. But even so: Aunt May as the herald of Galactus? And one called "Golden Oldie"? Really?

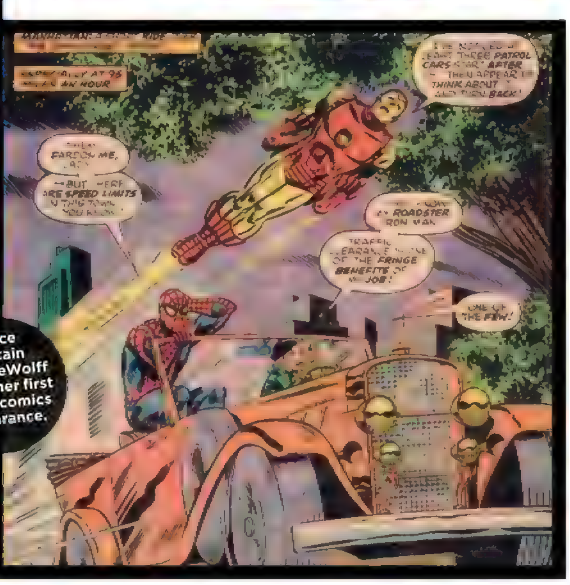




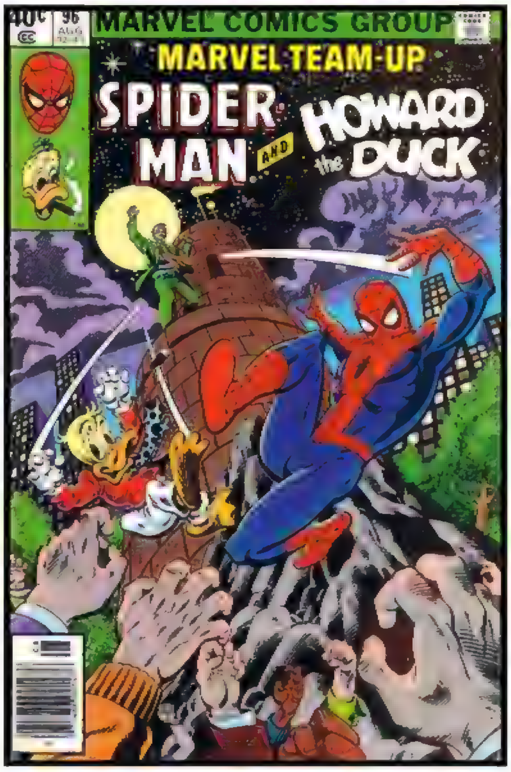
The first of a gem of a four-parter by Claremont and Sal Buscema.






ONE OF THE FEW!

Police Captain Jean DeWolff makes her first Marvel comics appearance.



choice. You'd get to meet some of the newer good guys not yet featuring in Marvel UK's black-and-white reprints, and you'd get a tale you could understand without having read the issue before, or the one after. Yet, at the same time, *MTU* showed a fealty to continuity now sadly lacking from most comics.

Amongst the most memorable issues of the original *Marvel Team-Up* run are the oddball ones: the one with Red Sonja mentioned above, the *Not Ready For Prime Time Players!* issue co-starring Dan Aykroyd, Bill Murray and the rest from *Saturday Night Live*, and #137, which saw Aunt May (as "Golden Oldie") and Franklin Richards battling Galactus as part of "Assistant Editor's Month" – the solution involved "Mostess Twinkles", no less.

Other times out we got the first-ever appearances of assorted villains (the Basilisk in #16 say, or dinosaur-man Stegron in #19) and even heroes. (Is that an uncredited Misty Knight in *MTU* #1? Apparently so, said a later John Byrne/Chris Claremont retcon.)

The likes of Captain Britain and Kulan Gath, the old Conan foe, made their first appearances in the mainstream American Marvel Universe in *MTU* too, and we got a rare four-colour sighting of the Sons Of The Tiger, the kung fu trio based on the three good guys from *Enter The Dragon* who had become mainstays of Marvel's black-and-white martial arts mags of the period.

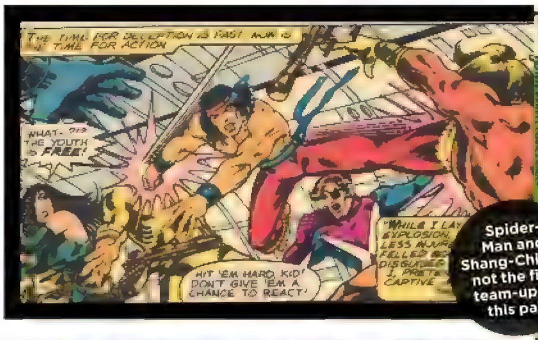
Elsewhere, we learned the origin of old hands like the Puppet Master (*MTU* #6), and took assorted detours to different godawful futures. At one point Spidey went to Killraven's post-Martian invasion landscape of 2013, and in another issue he visited Deathlok's dystopian version of 1990.

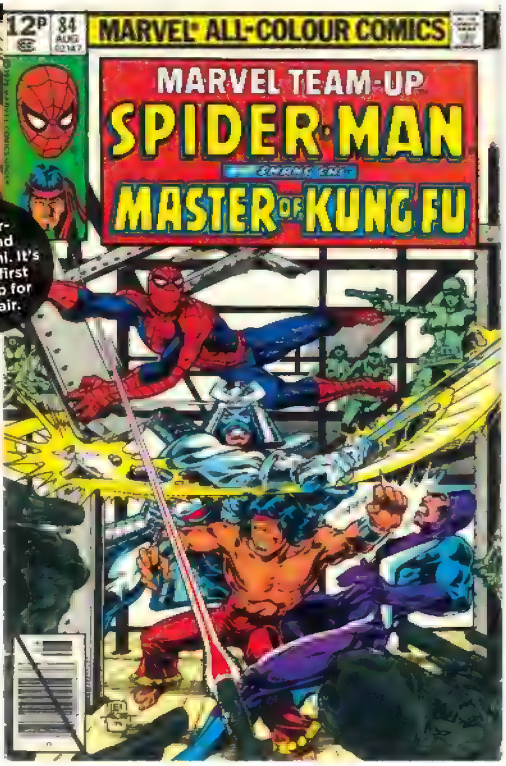
STRANGE TALES

During the early years, we'd get a new creative team on *MTU* every couple of issues. If we were lucky it would be Gil Kane, Jim Mooney or Ross Andru on art, other times it might perhaps be Sal Buscema. Regular writers included Gerry Conway, Lein Wein and Bill Mantlo. It was Conway – much maligned in some quarters, but such a great Spider-Man writer in his pomp – who really established a solid structure to the thing, where a single adventure might last for multiple issues, Spider-Man teaming with a different hero for each segment of it. Sure, Conway had his embarrassments – that Hercules issue, say – but when a single story might start with Spidey and Iron Man, see the Human Torch grab the baton in the middle, and climax with the Inhumans, you couldn't say it didn't rollick along in exciting fashion.

Bill Mantlo took the book yet further in the ongoing-storyline direction, soon even abandoning Conway's remit of bringing in a new hero every issue. His story arcs got longer and longer, having, say, Doctor Strange and Iron Man join Spidey for a full-on four-part adventure. Though some of the point of the title was surely lost here, this period included some of *MTU*'s most effective tales too, including issues #48-52, which introduced the Wraith as a bad guy and where we first met Police Captain Jean DeWolff – her death 10 years later would become one of the most celebrated Spider-Man stories of all time.

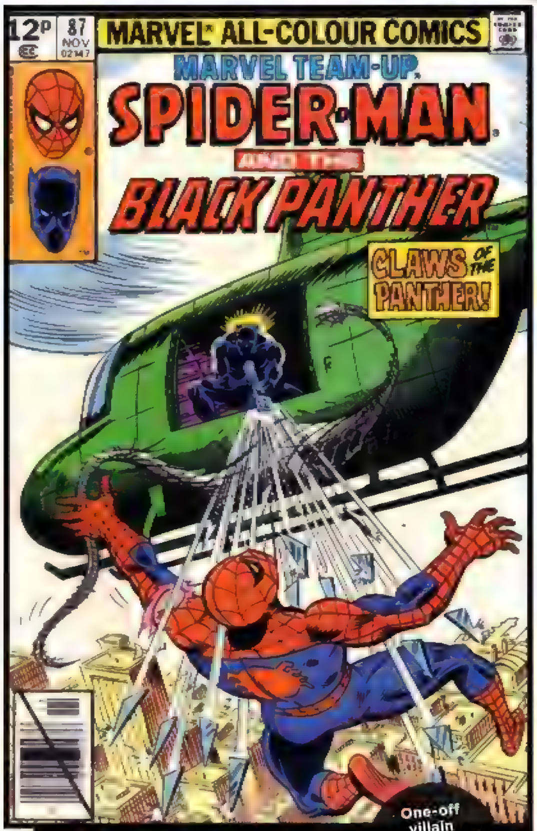
But there were to be other strong runs too, including the JM DeMatteis and Kerry Gammill era towards the end of the book's life, but especially


THE TIME FOR DECEPTION IS PAST. NOW IS THE TIME FOR ACTION
WHAT- DID THE YOUTH IS FREE!
HIT 'EM HARD, KID! DON'T GIVE 'EM A CHANCE TO REACT!
"WHILE I LAY EXPLOSION, LESS NURF FELLED BY DISGUISE I, PRETTY CAPTIVE


12p
84
AUG
02147
MARVEL ALL-COLOUR COMICS
MARVEL TEAM-UP
SPIDER-MAN
SHANG-CHI
MASTER OF KUNG FU

Spider-Man and Shang-Chi. It's not the first team-up for this pair.

ADVANTAGE OF GREAT STRENGTH--
DISORGANIZED THIS WAY THAT THEY CAN'T HOPE TO ACCOMPLISH ANYTHING!
LIKE I SAID BEFORE, PAL--
STRAK!
THEY'RE MEMORY IT KIND OF WIPES OUT EVERYTHING ELSE!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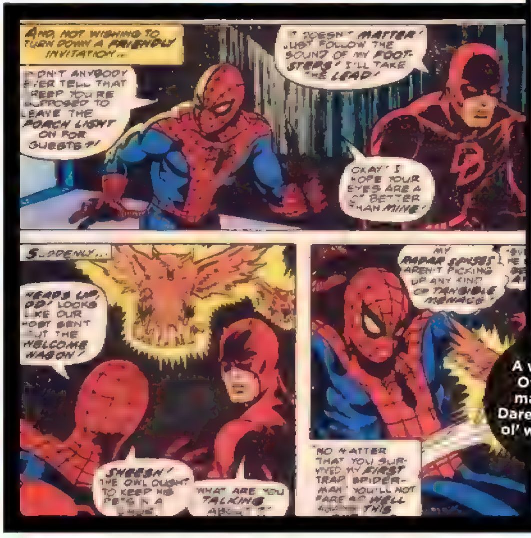
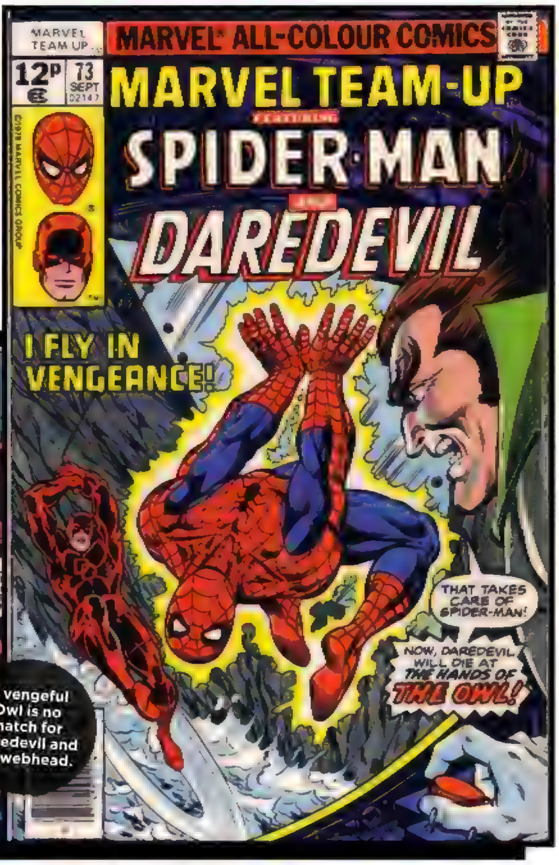
87
NOV
02147
MARVEL ALL-COLOUR COMICS
MARVEL TEAM-UP
SPIDER-MAN
AND THE
BLACK PANTHER
CLAWS OF THE PANTHER!

One-off villain Hellrazor made his sole appearance in *MTU* #87.

THERE ARE A LOT OF PEOPLE WHO WANT TO TALK TO YOU!


AND, NOT WISHING TO TURN DOWN A FRIENDLY INVITATION...
DON'T ANYBODY EVER TELL THAT CREEP YOU'RE SUPPOSED TO LEAVE THE PORCH LIGHT ON FOR GUESTS?!
IT DOESN'T MATTER! JUST FOLLOW THE SOUND OF MY FOOTSTEPS! I'LL TAKE THE LEAD!
OKAY! I HOPE YOUR EYES ARE A LOT BETTER THAN MINE!
SUDDENLY...
HEADS UP, DD! LOOKS LIKE OUR HOST SENT OUT THE WELCOME WAGON!
SHEESH! THE OWL OUGHT TO KEEP HIS PETS IN A CAGE!
WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT?
MY RADAR SENSES AREN'T PICKING UP ANY KIND OF TANGIBLE MENACE!
NO MATTER THAT YOU SURVIVED MY FIRST TRAP, SPIDER-MAN! YOU'LL NOT FARE AS WELL AGAINST THIS

A vengeful Owl is no match for Daredevil and ol' webhead.


MARVEL TEAM UP
12p
73
SEPT
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MARVEL ALL-COLOUR COMICS
MARVEL TEAM-UP
FEATURING
SPIDER-MAN
AND
DAREDEVIL
I FLY IN VENGEANCE!
THAT TAKES CARE OF SPIDER-MAN!
NOW, DAREDEVIL WILL DIE AT THE HANDS OF THE OWL!

> **“For about 30 issues *MTU* was one of the most handsome and entertaining books on the shelf”**

the Chris Claremont/John Byrne run from the late '50s on. The team that would go on to create such a hit out of *Uncanny X-Men* cut their teeth here, and it's as slick, fast-moving, sexy and entertaining as you'd hope for. It was around this point that another useful purpose for *MTU* became clear too – it was the perfect venue for tying off loose ends, such as the issue which dotted the i's and crossed the t's on the then-cancelled *Iron Fist*.

It didn't last long, but for about 30 issues *MTU* was one of the most handsome and entertaining books on the shelf, and when Claremont finally left with #89's Nightcrawler story (Byrne had already jumped ship) it started a slow spiral into decline, though the occasional strong DeMatteis/Gamill tale did arrest things occasionally.

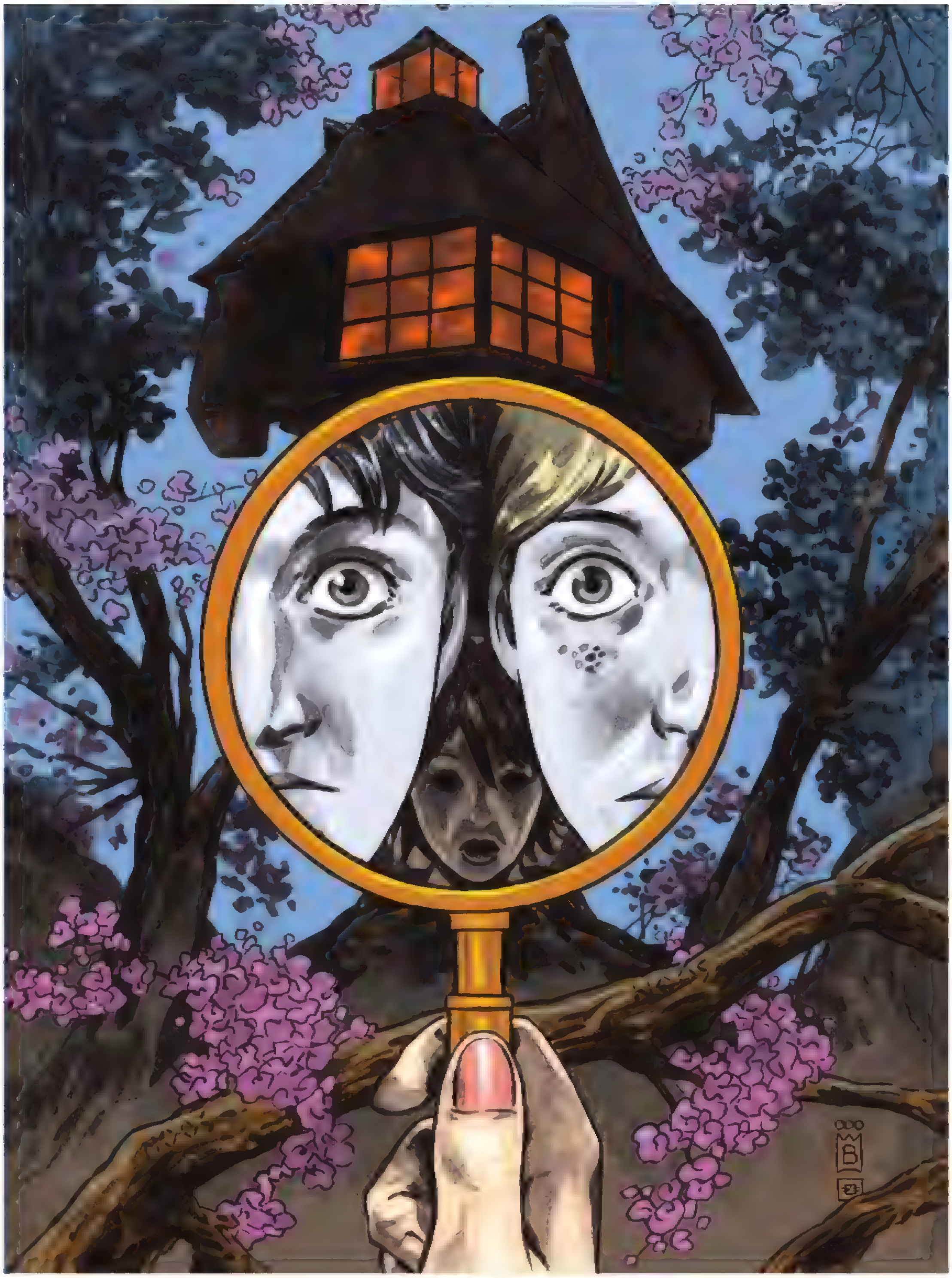
Marvel Team-Up itself was cancelled in 1985 with issue #150 (replaced by *Web Of Spider-Man*, a long-lived minor Spidey book) and it was easy to see why. By this point the company-wide crossover had become the norm – this was the year of *Marvel Super Heroes Secret Wars* and DC's *Crisis On Infinite Earths*, after all – and a small-time team-up title suddenly seemed surplus to requirements. (*Marvel Two-in-One* had been cancelled two years earlier, and its glory days were long behind it by that point too; we celebrate its most compelling storyline, "The Project Pegasus Saga", on page 162 this issue.)

Still, the affection people hold for these team-up books, and *Marvel Team-Up* in particular, is clear – and there have been numerous attempts to revive it since, notably in the late '90s (it lasted 11 issues) and again in 2005, which ran for 25. This later volume was largely written by Robert Kirkman of *The Walking Dead* fame, and went very off-piste with the concept – now each storyline might be five or six issues long, and see a random grab-bag of a half-dozen heroes team up against this villain or that.

Okay, so Marvel Phase 2 didn't bring to the table any new characters or concepts to rival those of Phase 1 some 10 years before, but it did kindle a new can-do attitude at Marvel, pulled strong (if sporadic) work from a range of inventive new creators just breaking into the industry, and cemented the firm's place at the top of the industry. And it dragged a whole new generation into reading comics – most especially though titles like *MTU*.

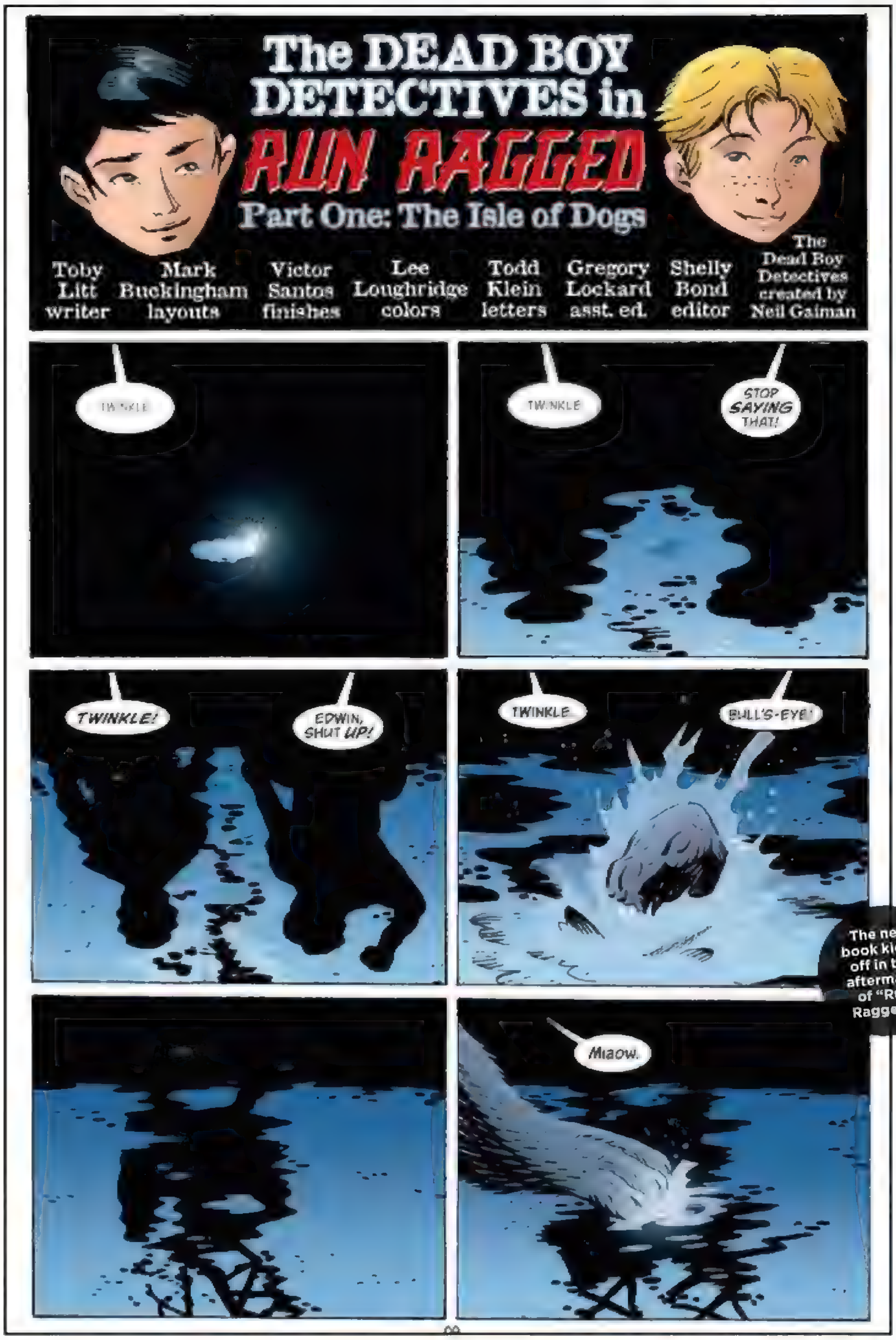
How many of us have this book to thank for our habit today? Probably more of us than care to admit it. CH

Four volumes of ***Essential Marvel Team-Up*** *so far have collected the first 98 issues, plus assorted annuals. The "bog paper" presentation rather suits the fun, but non-essential, nature of the title.*



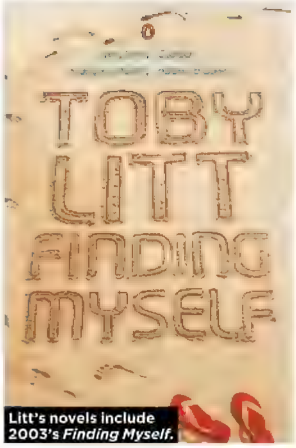
The Dead Boys Are Back In Town

After a brief dabble with the dead last year, acclaimed author Toby Litt once again teams up with artist Mark Buckingham for an ongoing new monthly series starring *Sandman*'s schoolboy sleuths. **By Stephen Jewell**

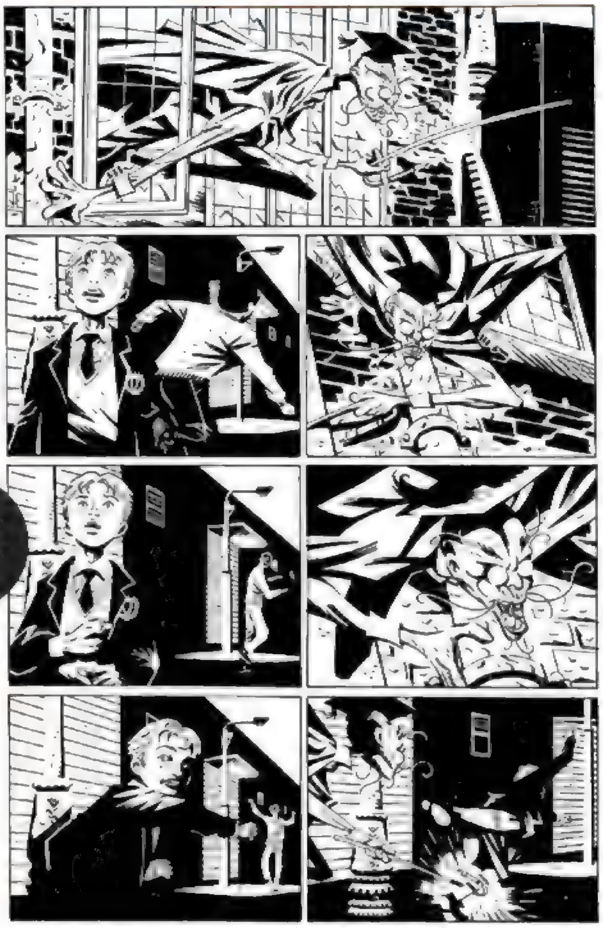

The DEAD BOY DETECTIVES in
RUN RAGGED
Part One: The Isle of Dogs
Toby Litt writer
Mark Buckingham layouts
Victor Santos finishes
Lee Loughridge colors
Todd Klein letters
Gregory Lockard asst. ed.
Shelly Bond editor
The Dead Boy Detectives created by Neil Gaiman
TWINKLE
TWINKLE
STOP SAYING THAT!
TWINKLE!
EDWIN, SHUT UP!
TWINKLE
BULL'S-EYE!
MIAOW.

The new book kicks off in the aftermath of "Run Ragged".

All images © DC Comics


TOBY LITT
FINDING MYSELF

Litt's novels include 2003's *Finding Myself.*



“ ***The Sandman*** **makes so much straight literary fiction seem mealy-mouthed and unambitious ”**

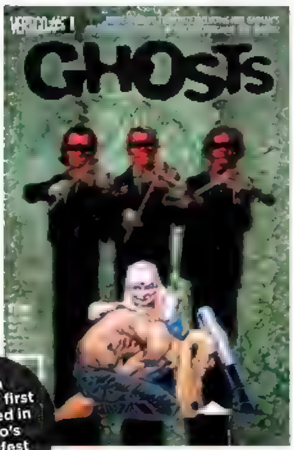
Like many people, Toby Litt had no idea how his favourite comic books were actually created when he first read them as a child. Now after 11, wildly eclectic novels including *Journey Into Space*, *Hospital* and *I Played the Drums In A Band Called Okay*, the Bedford-born author is branching out into the realm of words and pictures himself, penning a new Vertigo monthly spotlighting *Sandman*'s ex-schoolboy co-stars, the Dead Boy Detectives.

"When I started reading comics, I didn't really know how they were written," he cheerfully admits. "I suppose I thought that they just sort of exploded onto the page from a place where superheroes were real. Similarly, part of me used to believe that *Star Wars* was a real-life documentary about another part of the universe. But writers were something separate. Writers were writers and they wrote writing; black letters on white pages."

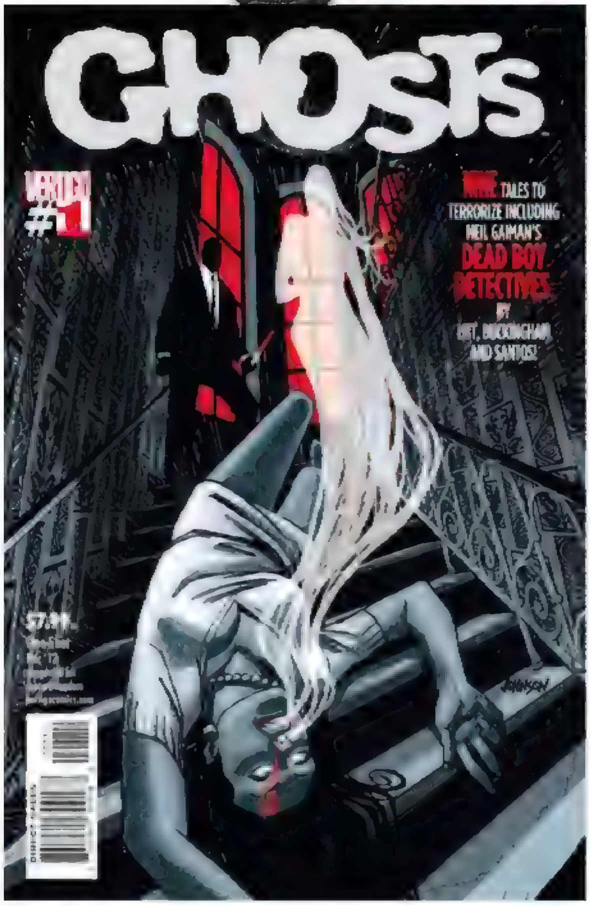
But even though he almost believed in the existence of a certain green-skinned, Betelgeusian editor, like some kids cling to the myth of Father Christmas, the 45-year-old has proved to be a fast learner. "When I got into *2000 AD* – which was my big comic – I still tended to go along with the fiction that Tharg was behind the whole thing," he laughs. "Despite noticing that the script-droids often had very English-looking names."

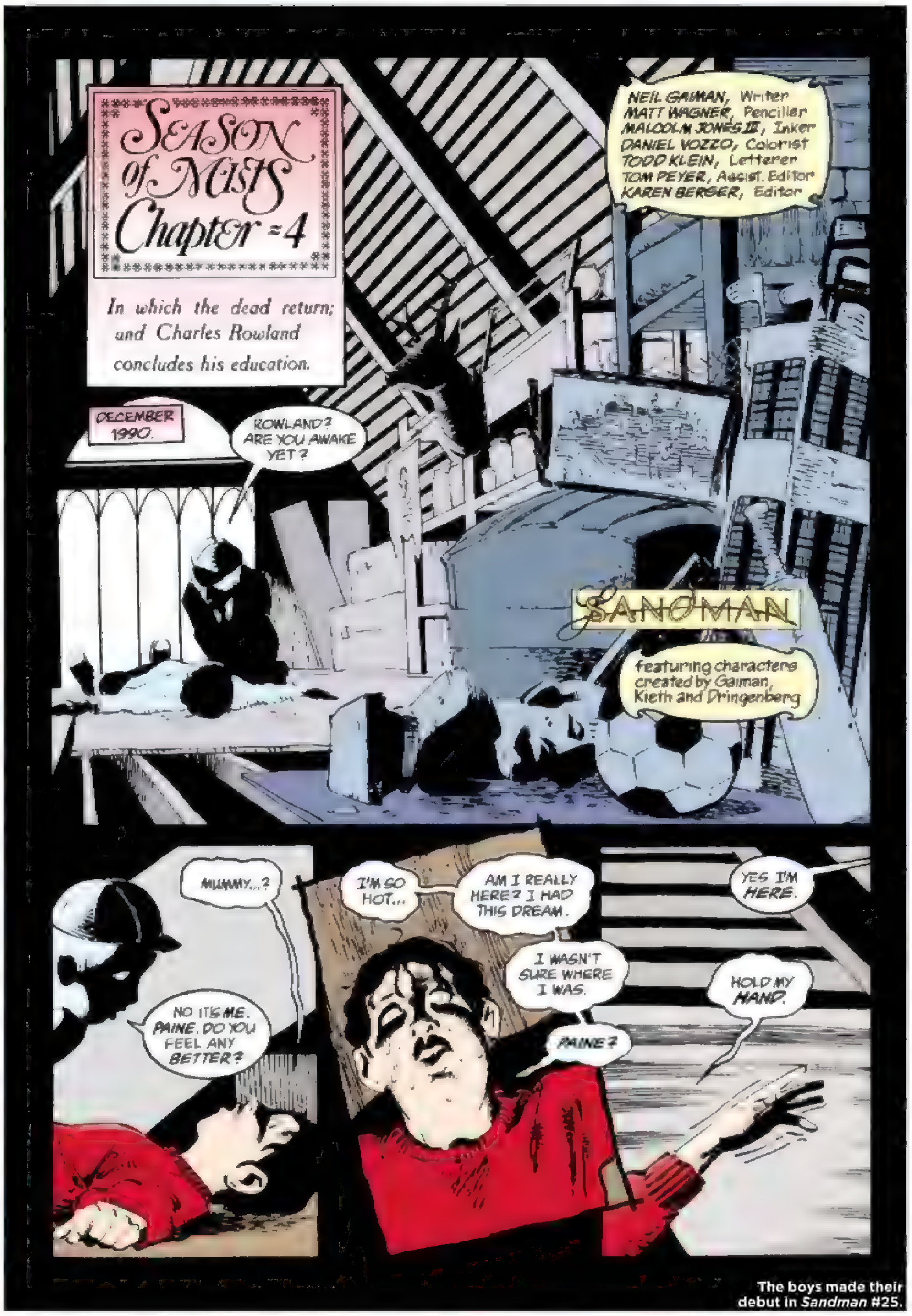
Recruited by Shelly Bond, executive editor of DC's cutting edge imprint, Litt was sent "lots of *Hellblazer*s to read" before being commissioned to script a 24-page *Dead Boy Detectives* story "Run Ragged" that has been serialised over the past 12 months in several of Vertigo's anthologies, including *Ghosts* and *Time Warp*.

The spooky young sleuths made their inaugural bow in the pages of *Sandman*, but Litt admits he only recently familiarised himself with Neil Gaiman's bestselling opus. "I'd read parts of it at university as I lived in a house of comic readers," he recalls. "But it wasn't until a couple of years ago that I read the whole series from start to finish. I found it quite overwhelming. It makes so much »


VERTIGO #5 1
GHOSTS

"Run Ragged" first appeared in Vertigo's spook-fest *Ghost*.


GHOSTS
VERTIGO #1
TALES TO TERRORIZE INCLUDING NEIL GAIMAN'S DEAD BOY DETECTIVES BY LITT, BUCKINGHAM AND SANTOS!
$7.99


SEASON of MISTS Chapter 4
In which the dead return; and Charles Rowland concludes his education.
NEIL GAIMAN, Writer
MATT WAGNER, Penciller
MALCOLM JONES III, Inker
DANIEL VOZZO, Colorist
TODD KLEIN, Letterer
TOM PEYER, Assist. Editor
KAREN BERGER, Editor
DECEMBER 1990.
ROWLAND? ARE YOU AWAKE YET?
SANDMAN
featuring characters created by Gaiman, Kieth and Dringenberg
MUMMY...?
NO IT'S ME. PAINE. DO YOU FEEL ANY BETTER?
I'M SO HOT...
AM I REALLY HERE? I HAD THIS DREAM.
I WASN'T SURE WHERE I WAS.
PAINE?
YES I'M HERE.
HOLD MY HAND.

The boys made their debut in *Sandman* #25.

straight literary fiction seem mealy-mouthed and unambitious. That's when I became a fan and I did particularly love (fourth arc) *Season Of Mists*."

BAD TEACHER

Dead Boy Detectives's monthly adventures are set in the immediate aftermath of "Run Ragged", and begin with the phantasmic young gumshoes dealing with the fallout from their encounter with the villainous Mr Locke. "Some of the consequences of what happened in the last story roll over into the boys' futures," teases Litt, who will introduce enigmatic young girl Crystal into the mix. "By the end of their encounter with Mr Locke, Charles and Edwin are quite unsettled. They need something to come along – something big – and it does."

Resembling an undead incarnation of Ralph Steadman's grotesque, larger-than-life teacher from Pink Floyd's *Another Brick In The Wall* artwork, the nefarious schoolmaster has been enthusiastically embraced by fans. "Mr Locke seems to have gone down quite well," says Litt. "He's a particularly horrible specimen of inhumanity. He's really vindictive and autocratic. And, yes, he will be back!"

Charles Rowland and Edwin Paine made their debut in the Matt Wagner and Malcolm Jones III-illustrated *Sandman* #25, resolving to continue solving supernatural crimes rather than acquiescing to the eternal peace and quiet of the afterlife. Gaiman resurrected the pair for his 1994 Vertigo crossover *Children's Crusade* and the spectral investigators were then spun out into a four-issue miniseries by Ed Brubaker and Bryan Talbot in 2001.

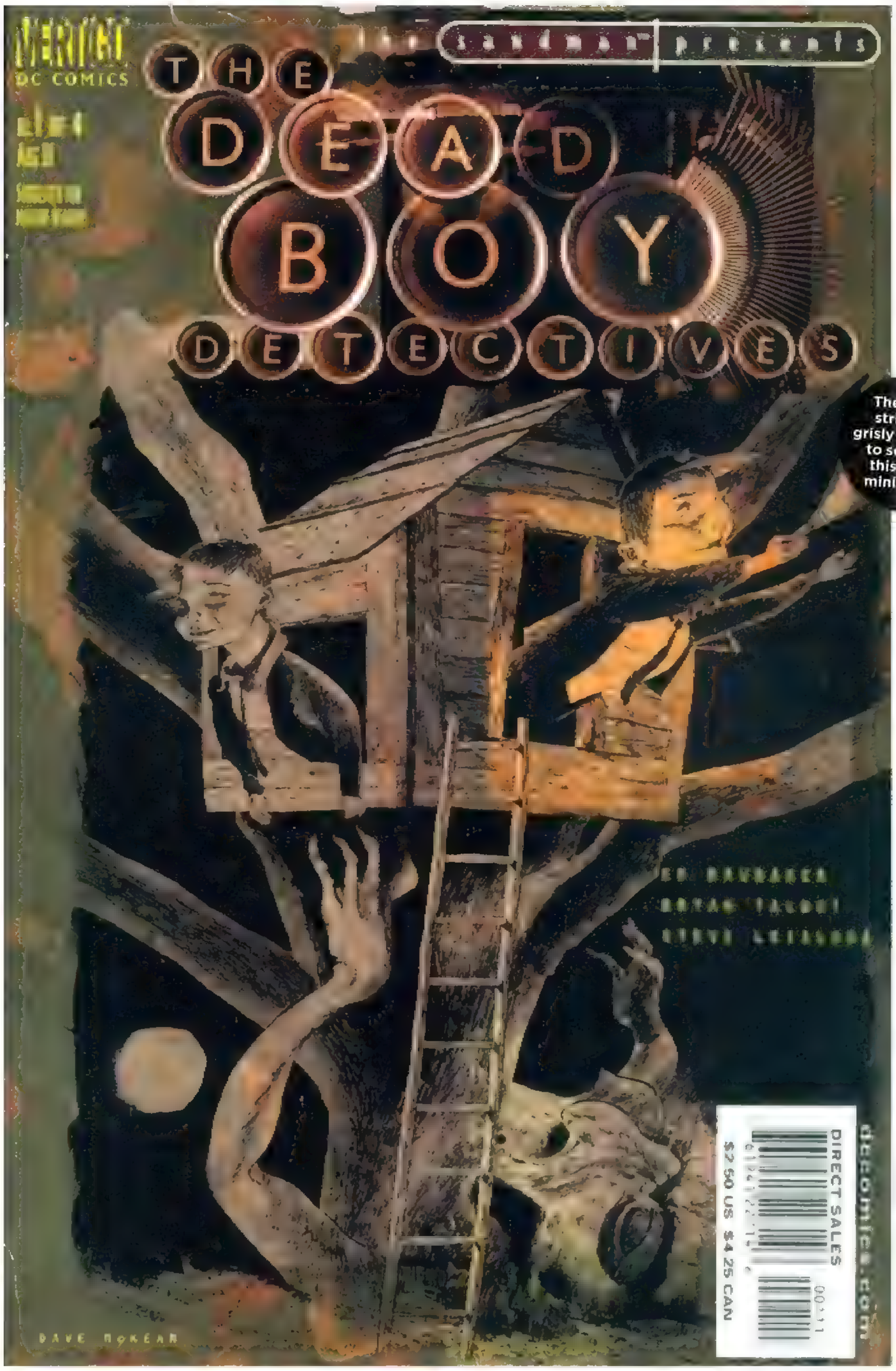
Edwin perished just before the start of the First World War in 1914 and Charles lost his life nearly 80 years later, soon after Margaret Thatcher's spectacular fall from power, but Litt maintains that it is not their respective, far-flung eras that sets the two of them apart. "The friendship between Charles and Edwin is the core of *Dead Boy Detectives* – they're devoted to one another," Litt reasons, "but they are very different characters. It was actually Neil Gaiman who pointed out to me that the big difference is the length of time that Edwin spent in hell. He's seen the unspeakable, and been reprieved, and this is more important than the difference in their ages."

Despite their ghostly status, Litt believes that Edwin and Charles are happy in their situation. "I don't think the boys are lonely, because they have one another, although quite often, they find that closeness claustrophobic," he says. "But they *are* extremely isolated. Being detectives is, for them, a way of making contact with the world."

Dead Boy Detectives was originally intended as a wry homage to precocious child sleuths such as the Secret Seven and Nancy Drew, but it has now really come into its own. "What I'm really riffing off is Neil Gaiman's great original idea for these two boys, each of whom is in love with a different kind of detective fiction," reveals Litt.

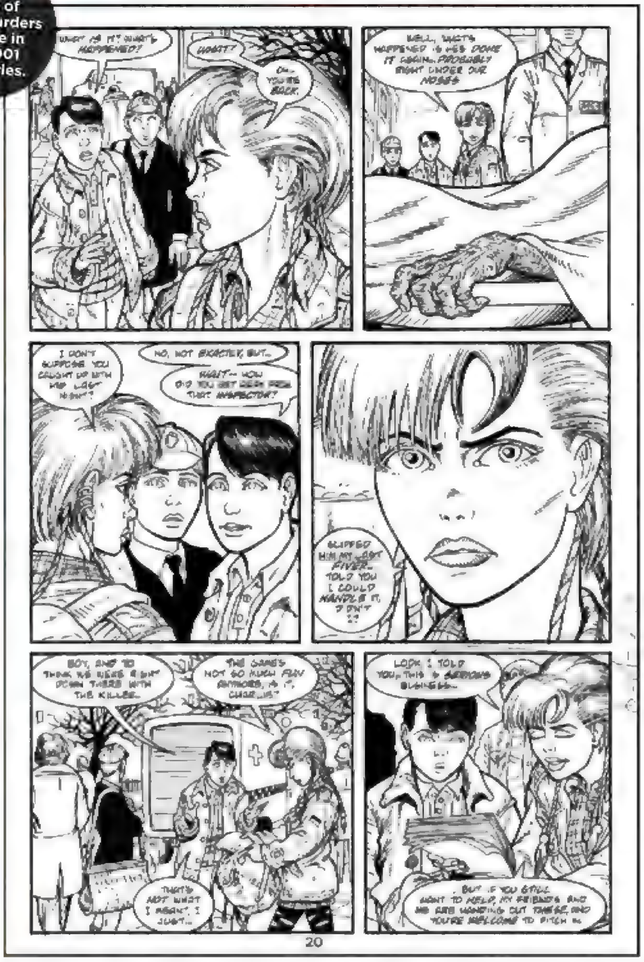
"Edwin loves Sherlock Holmes while Charles loves Philip Marlowe. The boys wouldn't want to be lumped in with the Famous Five or the Hardy Boys. It's a running theme throughout that adults are waging a war of aggression against children."

Dead Boys artist Mark Buckingham has worked with Gaiman on several projects – most notably the tragically still unfinished *Miracleman* – and


VERTIGO
DC COMICS
the sandman presents
THE DEAD BOY DETECTIVES
ED BRUBAKER
BRYAN TALBOT
STEVE LEIALOHA
DAVE McKEAN
DIRECT SALES
$2.50 US $4.25 CAN
dccomics.com

THE DEAD BOY DETECTIVES

There's a string of grisly murders to solve in this 2001 miniseries.


WHAT IS IT? WHAT'S HAPPENED?
WHAT?
OH... YOU'RE BACK.
WELL, WHAT'S HAPPENED IS HE'S DONE IT AGAIN... PROBABLY RIGHT UNDER OUR NOSES
I DON'T SUPPOSE YOU CAUGHT UP WITH HIM LAST NIGHT?
NO, NOT EXACTLY, BUT...
WAIT-- HOW DID YOU GET AWAY FROM THAT INSPECTOR?
SLIPPED HIM MY LAST FIVER... TOLD YOU I COULD HANDLE IT, DIDN'T I?
BOY, AND TO THINK WE WERE RIGHT DOWN THERE WITH THE KILLER...
THE GAME'S NOT SO MUCH FUN ANYMORE, IS IT, CHARLES?
THAT'S NOT WHAT I MEANT, I JUST...
LOOK, I TOLD YOU... THIS IS SERIOUS BUSINESS...
...BUT IF YOU STILL WANT TO HELP, MY FRIENDS AND ME ARE HANGING OUT THERE, AND YOU'RE WELCOME TO PITCH IN.
20

> **“Mr Locke is a particularly horrible specimen of inhumanity. He's really vindictive and autocratic”**

is turning out to be the perfect foil for a relative newcomer like Litt. “It has been incredibly great working with Bucky,” he says. “He's had a huge input into the stories as well as the visuals. *Fables* is one of the most amazing feats of drawing I've ever seen. It's fairly humbling to look at what he's achieved – just in that one title. Plus, he's an encyclopedia of Gaiman-related stuff. So, he knows the timelines, as well as the overall warmth and extravagance that we're going for.”

DEATH BECOMES HIM

Litt is currently balancing *Dead Boy Detectives* with putting the finishing touches to his forthcoming new novel, *My Mother's Seven Spirits*. “It's a supernatural thriller that's very fast and very violent,” he says. “But juggling one kind of writing with another has never been the biggest problem. That's always been just trying to juggle writing with living. What suffers the most is reading time, as well as watching films and TV.”

Working as part of a team has made a refreshing change, though. “Comics are more genuinely collaborative than anything I've ever done before,” he says. “They come closest to screenplay writing – but so far my screenplays haven't got to the point where I've had to deal with the likes of cinematographers and costume designers. Comics are a lot faster than novels, and less linear, and both more direct and more oblique. Mind you, I'm still getting my head round the direct/oblique thing.”

Unlike many of his peers, though, Litt has no burning ambition to stamp his mark on caped crusaders like Batman and Superman. “I don't read traditional superheroes as much as I do Vertigo stuff, or amazing artists like Daniel Clowes, Adrian Tomine, Charles Burns, Chris Ware,” he says. “I did an event at the Latitude Festival over the summer with Joff Winterhart, Corban Wilkin and Glyn Dillon and all of their work blew me away. But I also read Grant Morrison's *Supergods*, and have since been following up on some of the superhero titles I'd missed.”

Does he appreciate the wider range of themes that Vertigo's more expansive remit allows him to explore, then? “I'm really enjoying trying to set up a very ambitious and involving and emotional story, with lots of different levels and worlds,” he says. “I can only hope that readers will take to it, and get into it, and want to explore it further. Then we can carry on, together, month by month.” CH

Dead Boy Detectives #1 *is on sale 31 December.*

HIDDEN
GEMS

THE MAN OF BRONZE

Pulp action hero Doc Savage has had a multitude of incarnations in different media over the past 80 years, but the height of his career was probably an all-too-brief Marvel series in the '70s. **By James Lovegrove**

It's difficult to think of a comics publisher who hasn't taken a crack at Doc Savage. Over the years the rights to present sequential art versions of the Man of Bronze's adventures have been owned variously by Gold Key, Marvel, DC, Millennium and Dark Horse. Some have made a better job of it than others, but for our money the series which most faithfully captures the tone and feel of the original pulp novels is the eight-issue run produced by Curtis Magazines, a Marvel imprint, in the mid-1970s.

Doc Savage is the quintessential pulp-fiction science hero, a superman without any supernatural gifts or powers who has honed and developed himself to a peak of perfection. He is a scientist, scholar, surgeon, athlete, inventor, martial artist, explorer and all-round good guy whose every action is in accordance with a deeply altruistic oath: "Let me strive every moment of my life to make myself better and better, to the best of my ability, that all may profit by it. Let me think of the right and lend all my assistance to those who need it, with no regard for anything but justice. Let me take what comes with a smile, without loss of courage. Let me be considerate of my country, of my fellow citizens and my associates in everything I say and do. Let me do right to all, and wrong no man."

Clark Savage Jr, aka Doc, was the creation of publisher Henry W Ralston and editor John L Nanovic at Street & Smith Publications, but the man most closely associated with him is writer Lester Dent who, under the house pseudonym Kenneth Robeson, penned nearly all of the 181 original novels that appeared during the '30s and '40s.

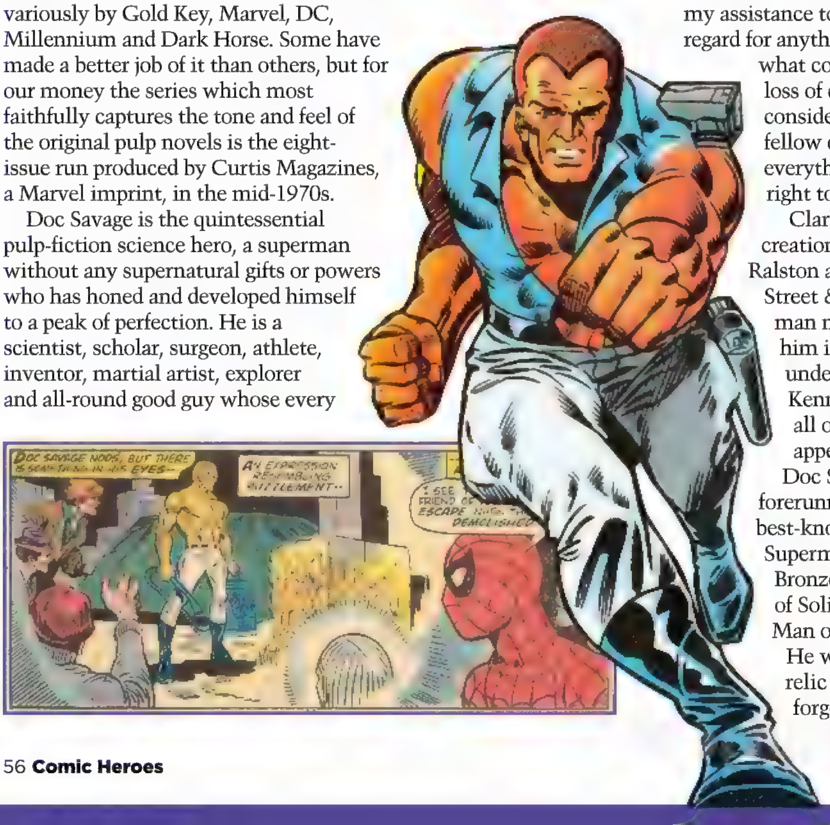
Doc Savage is regarded as the forerunner of many of today's best-known superheroes, not least Superman himself – the Man of Bronze had an Arctic-based Fortress of Solitude several years before the Man of Steel.

He would perhaps have become a relic of the Art Deco era, long forgotten, had Bantam Books not begun republishing the original novels in paperback in the '60s, most with gorgeous painted covers by James Bama. These helped re-popularise the character and paved the way for the 1974 George Pal movie *Doc Savage: The Man Of Bronze*, with former TV Tarzan Ron Ely in the title role.

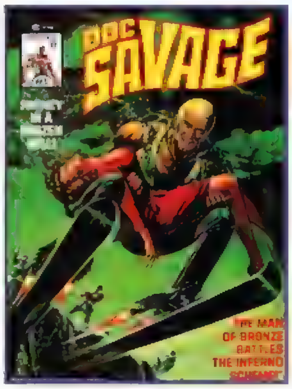
In the early '70s it was Marvel's turn on the Doc Savage comics rights merry-go-round, and initially the company produced four adaptations of Lester Dent's tales in the traditional four-colour format, two issues per story. These were repackaged in a collected edition by DC in 2010 and are well worth seeking out. Marvel teamed Doc with Spider-Man in *Giant-Size Spider-Man* #3 and also, memorably, with The Thing in *Marvel Two-In-One* #21, an intriguing tale in which the two characters' narratives run in parallel for the first half, each in his own era, until their paths finally cross on page 13.

SAVAGE GRACE

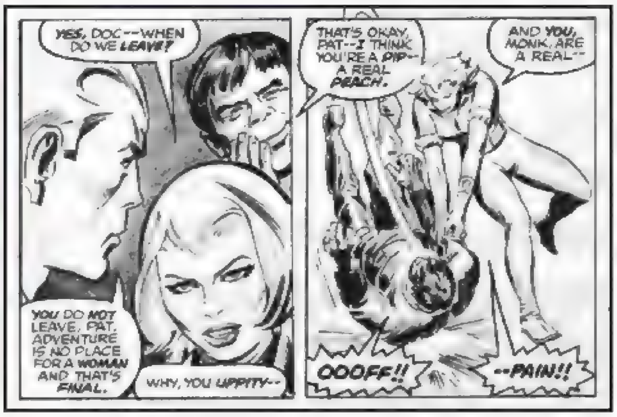
In between, Doc appeared in the black-and-white magazine-sized *Doc Savage*, a typically classy Curtis product. Ken Barr provided painted covers for all but the first issue, superlative portraits showing Doc, muscles straining through a ripped shirt, in combat with some outlandish foe – a snake-man, an armoured science villain, a giant moth, a red-eyed tentacular brain-monster. The character's image was highly stylised, in

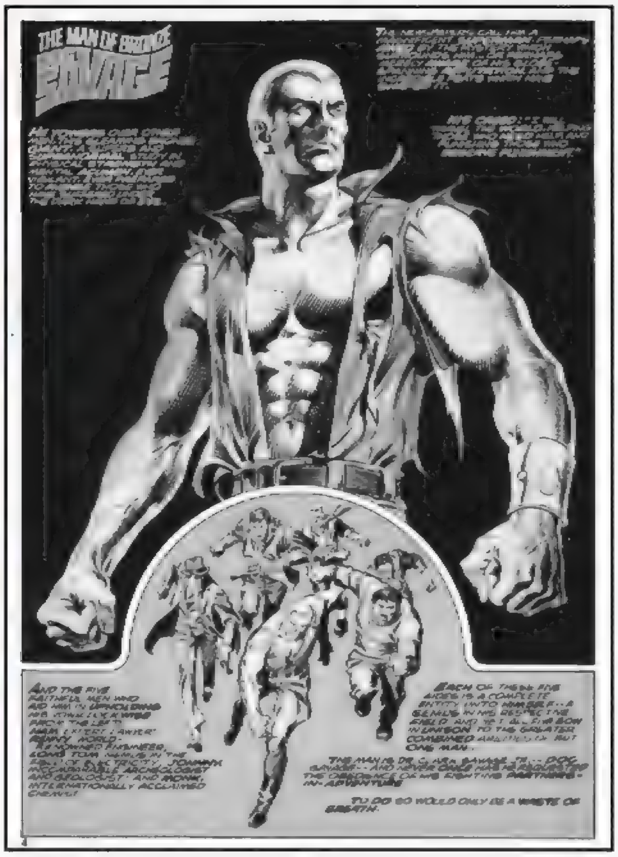


THE MAN OF BRONZE
DOC SAVAGE
1st ISSUE SPECTACULAR
ILLUSTRATED STORIES PHOTOS & FEATURES!
A DOC SAVAGE MOVIE EXCLUSIVE: GEORGE PAL SPEAKS!


DOC SAVAGE
THE MAN OF BRONZE BATTLES THE INFERNO SCHEME!

DOC SAVAGE
DEATH AT 1000 FEET FOR THE MAN OF BRONZE!
ALL NEW!
"THE SKY STEALERS!"


YES, DOC--WHEN DO WE LEAVE?
YOU DO NOT LEAVE, PAT. ADVENTURE IS NO PLACE FOR A WOMAN AND THAT'S FINAL.
WHY, YOU UPPITY--
THAT'S OKAY, PAT--I THINK YOU'RE A PIP--A REAL PEACH.
AND YOU, MONK, ARE A REAL--
OOOFF!!
--PAIN!!


THE MAN OF BRONZE
SAVAGE

HIGH ADVENTURE WITH THE GREATEST HERO OF ALL!
DOC SAVAGE
ALL NEW NOVEL-LENGTH THRILLER!
"THE EARTH WRECKERS"
THE MAN OF BRONZE UNCOVERS THE SECRET OF THE LOCH NESS MONSTER!

ALL NEW ACTION WITH THE MAN OF BRONZE!
DOC SAVAGE
NOVEL-LENGTH THRILLER
GHOST-PIRATES FROM THE BEYOND!

Above: Doc was trained by a team of scientists who gave his mind and body near-superhuman strengths – handy when grappling "Ghost-Pirates from The Beyond" or the Loch Ness Monster.

accordance with the Bantam book covers. In particular, Doc's hair was close-cropped, ash-blonde, with a widow's peak so sharp and pronounced you could cut yourself on it.

The image was carried over into the interior art, which gave Doc a "costume" of sorts: open-necked high-collared shirt, jodhpurs, knee-boots. Several artists worked on the book. John Buscema, Marie Severin and Val Mayerik provided pencils, and Ernie Chan supplied full art for issue #8. But the overall defining "look" of the series came courtesy of Filipino superstar Tony DeZuniga, who inked most of the stories and solely pencilled and inked three. His elegant, feathery brushwork and skilled use of wash shading was exemplary. Apart from anything else, this was a comic that looked polished and sophisticated.

Great art alone is not enough, though, and luckily the scripts by Doug Moench match DeZuniga's efforts. Moench elected to write brand-new Doc tales, with all the elements which made the original pulp novels so trashily moreish. Doc's five companions feature prominently, and Moench characterises them to a T. Apeish chemist "Monk" Mayfair is forever squabbling with his effete lawyer "Ham" Brooks. Dour engineer "Renny" Renwick regularly delivers his trademark "punch through solid oak". Bespectacled electricity expert "Long Tom" Roberts is frail-looking but scrappy, while sesquipedalian archaeologist "Johnny" Littlejohn utters his catchphrase – "Well, I'll be superamalgamated!" – at least once per strip.

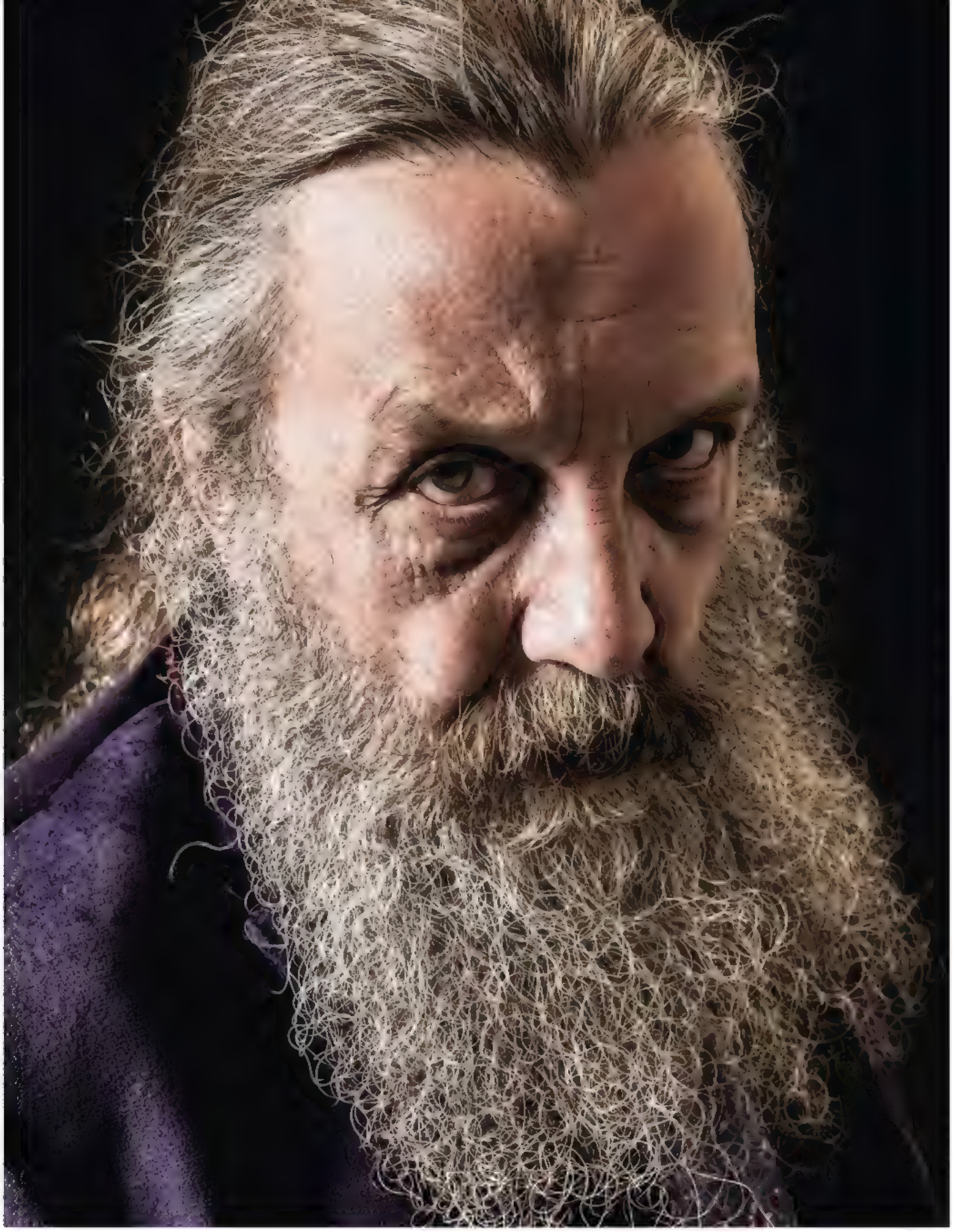
Other classic Doc elements present and correct in Moench's scripts are the Amberjack zeppelin, the Helldiver submarine, the autogyro, and the "flea run" pneumatic tube which whizzes our heroes from Doc's 86th-floor skyscraper apartment to his dockside "Hidalgo Trading Company" hangar – not to mention the Man of Bronze's Amazonian cousin Pat, who is determined to prove herself the equal of any male but somehow – typical pesky dame – always ends up causing trouble.

Moench's plots are a reliable melange of pulp tropes. The stories open with a visitor, usually a beautiful woman, enlisting Doc's aid in solving a mystery. There are trails of clues – the complex anagrams in #1 are particularly good – and more often than not the baddie is a masked megalomaniac with world-conquering ambitions. Otherworldly phenomena such as ghosts and monsters are discovered to have solidly scientific rationales, although there is still room for hidden subterranean civilisations, bizarre robotic creations, and plenty of good old mutation-causing radiation.

In short, Moench's Savage Tales are imbued with fidelity and love for the original. Some would say they even surpass Dent's own work, which was written to formula and in great haste in order to meet swingeing deadlines and which Dent himself dismissed as "reams and reams of sellable crap".

The only thing wrong with Marvel/Curtis's *Doc Savage*, in fact, was that it was cancelled after only eight issues as part of general company-wide cutbacks. But the run is all the sweeter for being so short-lived. **CH**

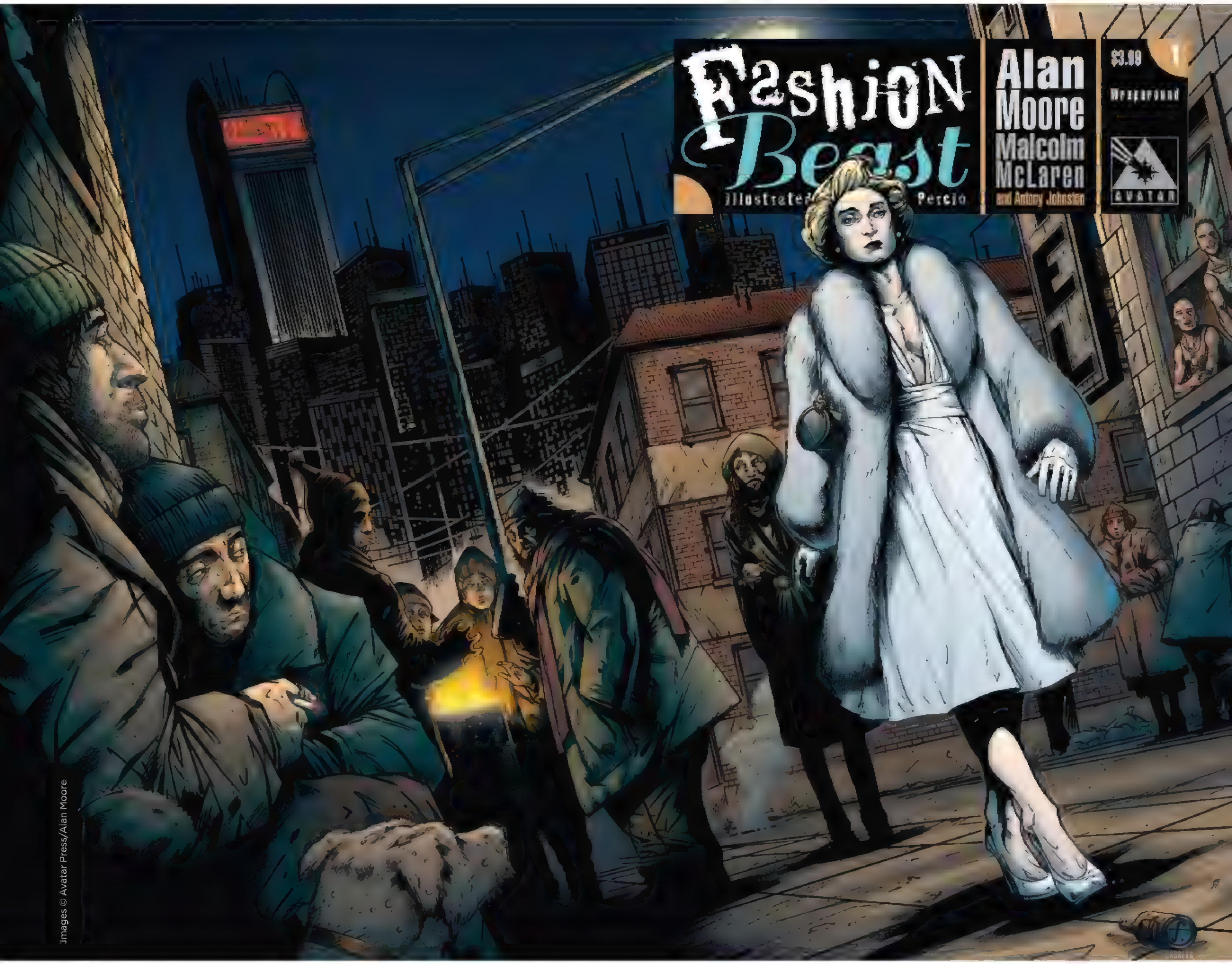
The issues are collected in a budget-priced ***DC Showcase Presents*** *compendium volume.*



Photograph © Kevin Nixon

DARK GLAMOUR

Sixty years young next month, the world's most celebrated comics writer is on fine form. New projects, like an HP Lovecraft epic, are on the cards, and an old one, *Fashion Beast*, is re-emerging into a world that's finally ready for it... **By Matt Bielby**



Images © Avatar Press/Alan Moore

Some time has passed since *Comic Heroes* last interviewed Alan Moore, the Northampton-based comic book writer whose most popular works, including *Watchmen* and *V For Vendetta*, redefined what mainstream adventure comics might be in the '80s, and whose level of invention has hardly let up since. Back then it was all doom and gloom about the state of the comic book industry.

I last spoke with him myself at length some five years ago, and sure, the conversation then too revolved around his general but deep-seated distaste for the mainstream American product. But that's not what I actually remember from the meeting, which was much more fun, wide-ranging and sparky than it's easy to get down on paper. What doesn't always come across in Alan Moore interviews is the humble charm of the man, or the twinkle in his eye when he says stuff – yes, he's got strong opinions, and yes, you might not always agree with him. But there's no way you ever leave the room feeling more miserable about life or comics than you did when you went in.

Back in 2008, the big news was this: there was the sporadically-ongoing adventures of *The League Of Extraordinary Gentlemen* with artist Kevin O'Neill; there was *The Moon And Serpent Bumper Book Of Magic*, which he was writing with old buddy Steve Moore, that man who got him into both comics and magic in the first place; and there was the mighty *Jerusalem*, a huge novel of at least a few 1,000 pages – just 1,000 is as big as it is practical to hold – which takes as its subject the history of Moore's hometown, Northampton, but by all accounts drags in angels and ghost children and just about every writing style imaginable.

And guess what? Here at the end of 2013, all three are still ongoing projects. "Well, I am nearly at the end of *Jerusalem*," Moore says. Blimey. We're not going to hold our breaths, but it'll be incredible to finally see it – probably as three volumes in some sort of slipcase, as it's going to be virtually impossible to bind it together in any other way. And *The Moon And Serpent Bumper Book of Magic* – a visually more complicated project – remains further yet from being completed, though there's movement here too. As with most Moore projects these days, what matters is not getting it out on time, but getting it right.

On top of the little trio mentioned above, Moore's got new projects and interests too, of course. The writer will no longer work with Marvel or DC, but some of the smaller publishers are okay, and comics are back

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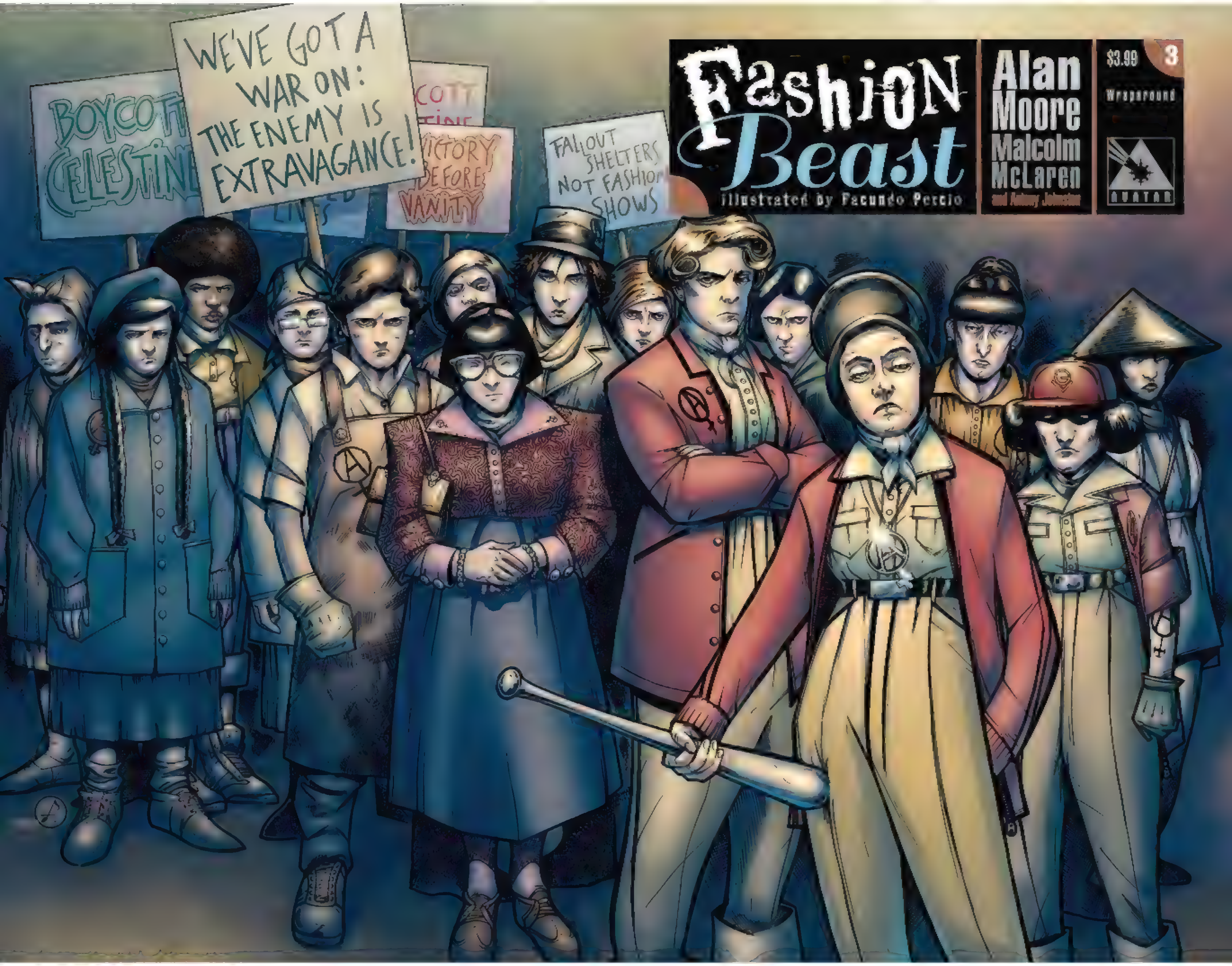
> “It's *Beauty And The Beast* fused with the life story of Dior”

Above: The haves and the have-nots of *Fashion Beast*, Moore's gritty urban fairytale.



Above: Baseball bats and anarchy-style pendants are the accessories of choice for the anti-fashion army.

on the agenda. At the moment, one of the favoured venues is Avatar Press, once known for its "bad girl" comics – *Pandora*, *Lady Death* – but now publishing edgy horror work by some of the best British writers, including Garth Ennis (*Stitched*, *Crossed*), Warren Ellis (*Doktor Sleepless*, *Anna Mercury*) and now Moore, whose *Neonomicon* with artist Jacen Burrows won Best Graphic Novel at the Bram Stoker Awards.

Up next for Avatar is an epic horror tale based on the life and works of HP Lovecraft called *Providence*, but first we talk about *Fashion Beast*, one of the more unlikely projects from Moore's always eclectic CV, and a relic of the late '80s that most had completely forgotten.

HE'S IN FASHION

Fashion Beast began as a screenplay written by Moore around the same time he was doing *Watchmen*, commissioned by Sex Pistols manager and all-round impresario Malcolm McLaren. "The original thing was apparently written," says Moore now, "and I'd forgotten this, way back in 1985. Which perhaps explains why I had forgotten it. And apparently Malcolm had forgotten it as well. But it was a really interesting project. I found it fascinating working with Malcolm, and I think we'd both got quite high hopes for the film at the time. Of course, as is the way with these things, it never materialised."

So how close do you think it was to being made at the time?

"Who can say? The majority of films don't make it to the screen. I just thought: okay, I got well paid for it, I had the experience of writing in a new form, and I'd got to meet Malcolm, so I considered it a pleasurable and a beneficial experience. But then, in 2005 or so, William Christensen at Avatar got in touch, saying he'd just acquired the *Fashion Beast* screenplay in the way that you do, and asking if I'd have any objections to it being realised as a comic."

And did you?

"Well, no. Although I'm generally against adaptations the other way – turning a comic into a film – this seemed different. I thought that something that had been written as a film screenplay could – in the hands of a capable adapter, such as the brilliant Antony Johnston, who's adapted some of my other works – work quite well, and that maybe it was worth a go. When William told me that Antony – who I trust implicitly – would be handling the adaptation I thought, sure, go ahead."

Was it something you'd looked at again since the late '80s?

"Not once."

But you did have a copy yourself?

"If you ever see my house, you'll know the futility of asking that question. I may have had. I may have the Holy Grail somewhere in my cellar, but I'm never going to see it again."

It was probably very welcome that someone else would handle the

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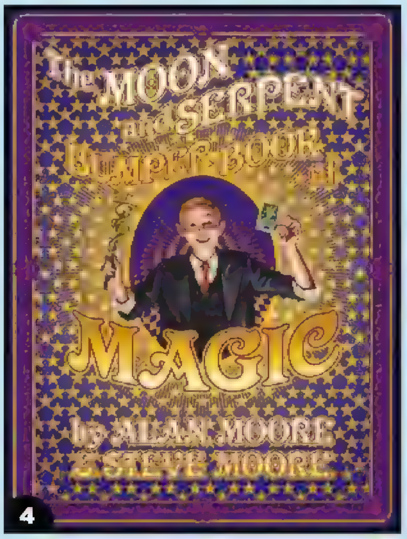
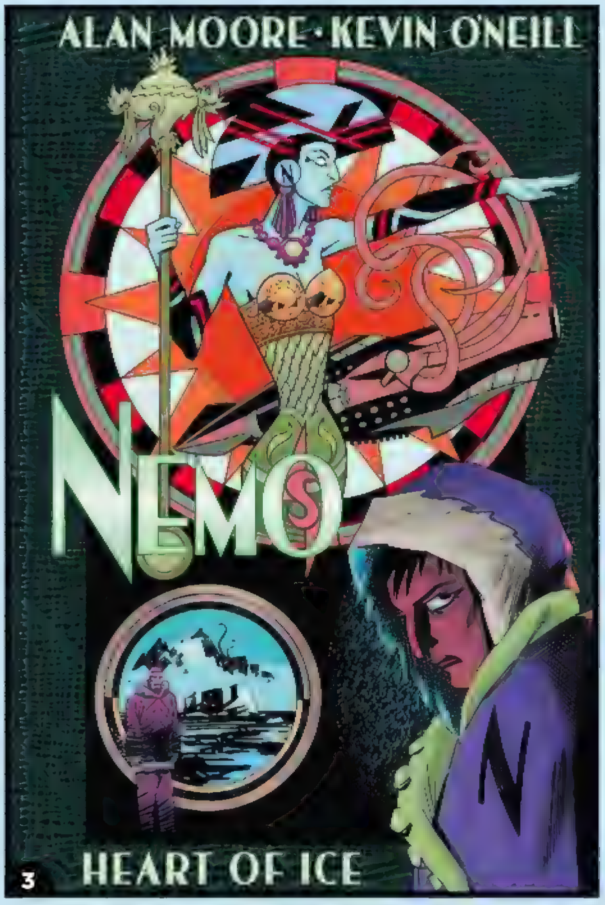
More **Moore**

For a guy who's semi-retired from mainstream comics, there's an awful lot of new Alan Moore stuff due soon (and soon-ish)...





1. JERUSALEM

Not exactly a sequel to Moore's only prose novel to date, *Voice Of The Fire* (1996), but with some elements in common, *Jerusalem* promises to be a strange, intriguing and exhaustive history of Northampton, the writer's hometown, amongst other things – and a true giant, perhaps 2,000 pages long!

It jumps around time periods and characters, and the connections between them are not always immediately apparent; key to it is the premise that this is a universe with four dimensions, and that perhaps every moment is eternal, and we live our loves over and over again.

"Having lived in one place all my life means you could never say that I have a broad knowledge of the world, but I have a very deep knowledge of this part of the world," says Moore.

Who knows when it will actually be finished and ready: Moore's been saying "a couple of years" for the past few couple of years. There'll be 35 chapters, the thing will be broadly divided into three parts, and – especially towards the end – expect *Jerusalem* to bounce around all over the place in terms of form and style. Be warned: some of it will be in verse!

2. JIMMY'S END

Another oddity: Moore's written a cycle of five short, interlocking David Lynchian experimental films under this overall title – some of them half an hour, others only 10 minutes long – and most of them have now been shot by Northampton photographer Mitch Jenkins.

The idea is that a feature film sequel might follow, apparently to be titled *The Show*; a TV series is possible too. The whole thing grew out of a photo essay on burlesque that ran in *Dodgem Logic*, Moore's now apparently deceased experimental magazine.

3. THE LEAGUE OF EXTRAORDINARY GENTLEMEN

The full-on *League Of Extraordinary Gentlemen* epics are taking a little rest for a while, but the gap's being filled by a series of smaller one-shot books. There will most likely be three of them, all concentrating on the tough, troubled Janni Nemo, the great man's daughter, who was so memorably introduced in *Volume III: Century*.

We've already had *Nemo: Heart Of Ice*, which took her on an Antarctic Lovecraftian adventure, and the second is to be called *The Roses Of Berlin*, set in 1941 and due some time in 2014. A blockbusting fourth volume of the *League* proper is on its way, though, but it's way further off.

4. THE MOON AND SERPENT BUMPER BOOK OF MAGIC

Moore's doing this one with his friend and mentor Steve Moore; both are practising magicians of a sort, and felt it might be a good idea to put all their thinking about magic down in some sort of coherent form.

The result will look like a particularly luxurious children's Christmas annual from the 1950s, probably with clean, smiling middle-class kids on the front welcoming you in.

The idea is that this is honest magic, not showbiz or gothy, with some pretty sound basic theory behind, plus biographies on all the most important "real life" magicians, and a chapter on practical magic – and why you probably shouldn't do it.

Confirmed illustrators include Kevin O'Neill and Moore's wife Melinda Gebbie.

This one appears to be coming along too, but very slowly. Seeing it in 2014 would seem a minor miracle, though we can but hope.

5. PROVIDENCE

This is the HP Lovecraft biography-cum-horror story, to be published by Avatar as a 12-issue miniseries. It's an attempt at writing an ultimate bit of Lovecraftian fiction, though more influenced by the New England/New York stuff than far-flung adventures like "The Mountains Of Madness".

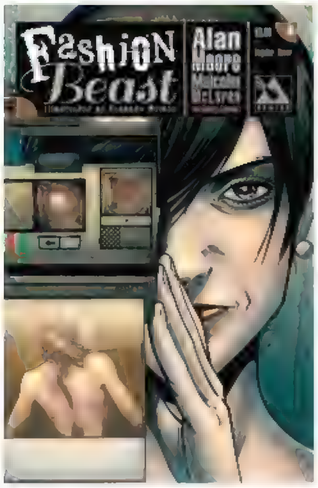
Moore touched on this material a couple of years ago with his four-issue Avatar Press miniseries *Neonomicon*, which in turn had been developed from "The Courtyard" a mid-'90s prose short story he'd written in the manner of Lovecraft.

Neonomicon brought explicitly to the surface the sexual deviancy and racism buried deep in Lovecraft, and it seems likely we can expect more of that here – though the overriding feel is likely to be of the, "What if all Lovecraft's characters and monsters were actually real, or based on something real?" variety.

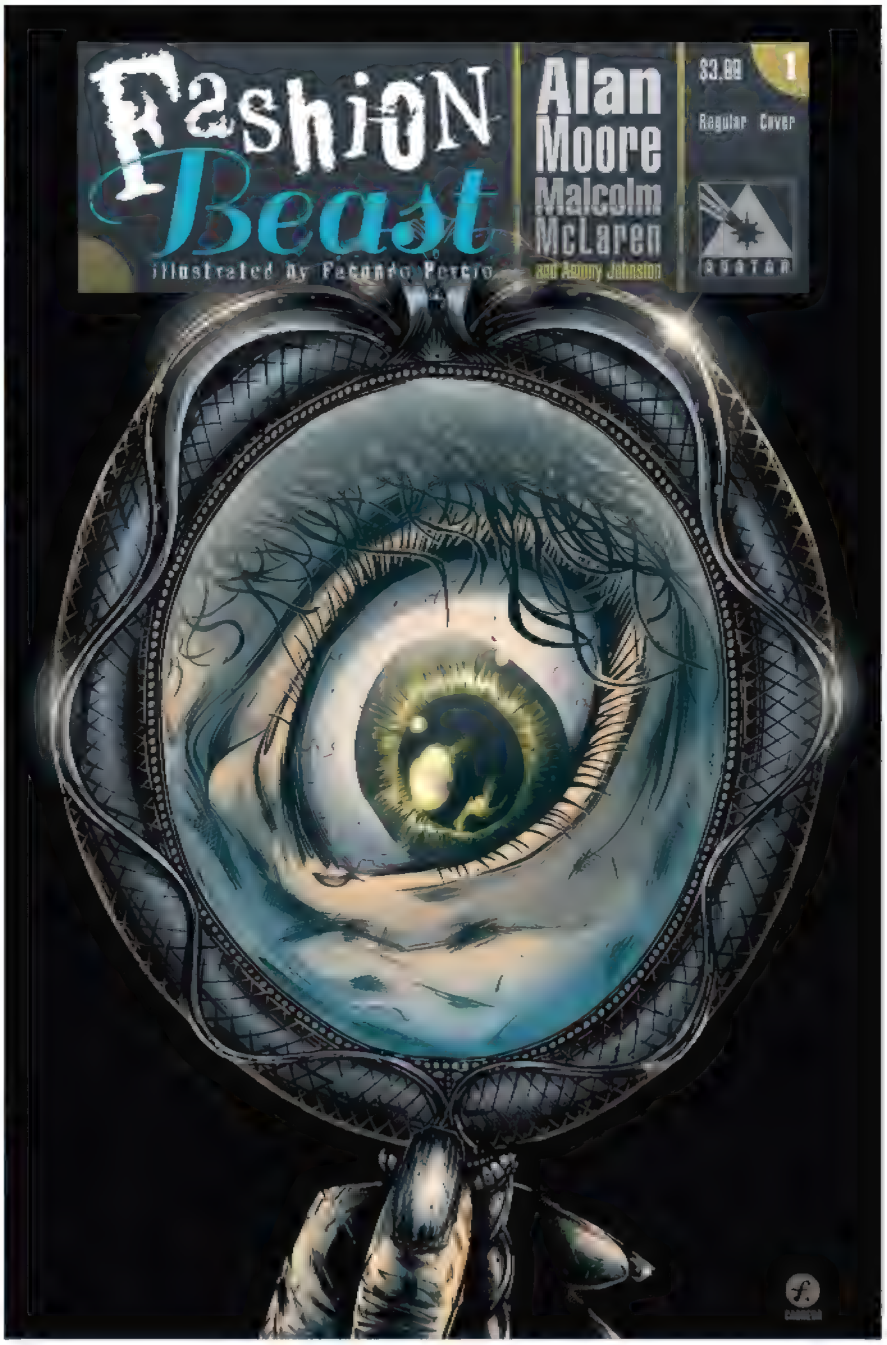
Individual issues will spill out of assorted specific Lovecraft stories or story clusters – one will be based on "The Dunwich Horror", perhaps – but will refer to all the real-world fears and prejudices that must have inspired them.

Expect some of the horror feel of Moore's *Swamp Thing* run mixed with the painstaking research of *From Hell*, perhaps; whatever, expect it to be very, very good.

Fashion Beast
Alan Moore
Malcolm McLaren



Fashion Beast
Alan Moore
Malcolm McLaren



Right: Expect a good deal of soul searching as the characters struggle with gender and identity issues.

adaptation then, I suggest. It's not always fun looking back at old work you once did.

"Oh, it's not," says Moore. "I've never been able to do that – but I was happy enough handing it over to the capable hands of William and Antony and the artist, Facundo Percio, who was a complete revelation to me. His work is fantastic.

"Malcolm phoned up too, and we had what turned out to be our final conversation – very congenial – then sat back to see what it would look like. But it was a long process, a big project – it took Facundo four years to draw the 10 issues, I believe. But that was fine; there was no point rushing it at that point. The end result is how it will be forever, and in the future nobody will care that it appeared on this date or that date back in the past."

Malcolm never got to see it, of course.

"No, by the time it finally emerged, I was the only surviving parent – though I believe he did get to see bits and pieces along the way. I'd like to think that he would have enjoyed it, because I found it stunning. I was completely astounded, for instance, by a lot of the dialogue, which I didn't remember writing, and some of the scenes and the situations. I really only had very vague memories of it. 1985 was a completely different world – and specifically in the world of fashion, which I hardly knew anything about at the time. If *Fashion Beast* had been produced then, I think it would have been completely unfathomable to its audience; they wouldn't have recognised anything in my vision. It would have seemed like a surrealist nightmare."

> **“ I found it fascinating working with Malcolm ”**

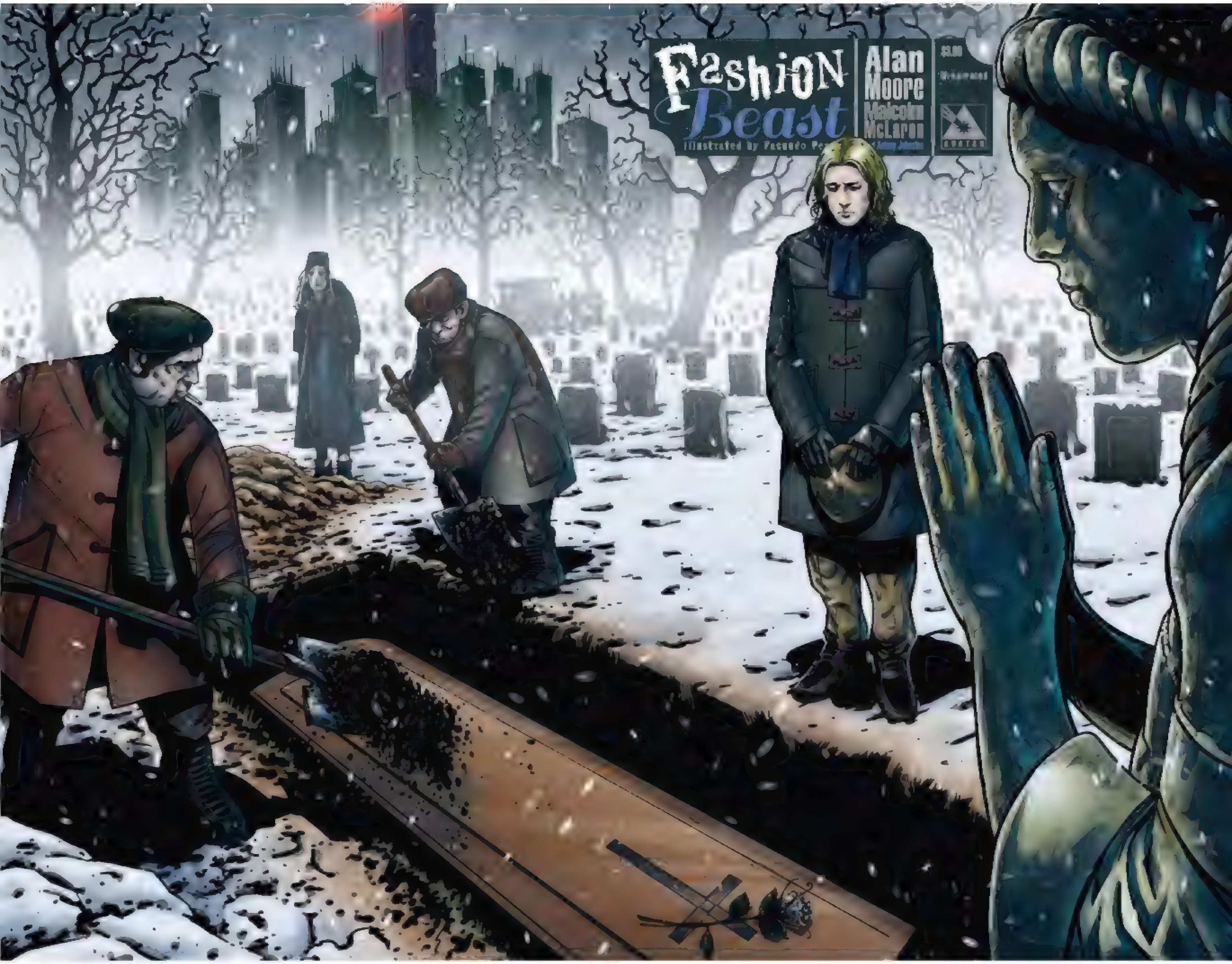
And the world of fashion's been through a few twists and turns since then.

"Yes, time passes. In 2013 the picture of the fashion industry that it paints, and the world in which that fashion industry exists, is a lot more recognisable. There's even funny weather, like I put in the script! It's a backdrop that makes a lot more sense from a 21st century perspective than it ever did in the mid-'80s. We've had John Galliano and his fascist statements, Gianni Versace getting shot, Alexander McQueen. When I read the finished comic, I thought, 'Oh, yeah, of course – part of the story's just like McQueen.' It's funny how things work out."

Not that *Fashion Beast* was ever meant to be a realistic depiction of the fashion world as it existed towards the end of the 20th century. It tells of a young boy and a young girl – or are they? Gender blurs here – working at Celestine, a huge industrial horror show of a fashion house that squats over a sad, broken, near future New York. But who's really in charge here? And will either of them meet the reclusive designer at the heart of it all?

Moore never really researched the real-life industry of the '80s, but he did look into the fashion world of earlier eras, the '40s and '50s of Pierre Balmain, Jeanne Lanvin and Christian Dior.

"That was my brief," he says now. "Malcolm wanted me to fuse the fable of *Beauty And The Beast* with the life story of Dior, and they seemed to go together quite nicely into this gothic mess. That was pretty much it as far as Malcolm's brief to me went, apart from a few extra elements he added later – he asked me to make it a bit like *Flashdance* and a bit like *Chinatown*. I



Above: *Fashion Beast*'s world is teetering on the brink of a nuclear winter – a very '80s threat, but one that doesn't seem so anachronistic today.

think I incorporated those adequately into the thing. I remember very much enjoying reading about guys like Christian Dior and Yves Saint Laurent, though, and what their world was like; I immersed myself in it at least enough to fake knowing what a 'chignon' was!"

AMERICAN GOTHIC

The type of work that first made Alan Moore famous was sharp, witty superhero stories, of course, and they rarely necessitated all that much research, beyond reading back issues of the character he was handling. Increasingly, though, Moore's been roaming in the historical fiction playground, and be it *From Hell*, *Lost Girls* or the continuing adventure of *The League*, his stories would now seem to revolve around a prodigious amount of background knowledge. Does he enjoy reading up on a subject these days, I wonder?

"Oh, I love researching. Love it. It used to be a thing I shied away from, but it's become very much part of the pleasure of working for me now. One of the most enjoyable parts of it all, to be honest. Right now I'm immersed in research on my current project, a new comic series I'm doing with Avatar which won't be out until next year. It's perhaps the most research I've ever done – I'm walled in by reference books that I've bought over the past 12 months just to get up to speed on this project, and it's like [Edgar Allan Poe short story] 'The Cask Of Amontillado' at home – someone will put the last book into place and I'll be like, 'For the love of God, Montresor!' And that will be it – you'll never hear from me again."

The project Moore's talking about is called *Providence*, and it's quite the biggest thing he'll have done in the comics medium since *League Volume III: Century*, the three volumes of which ran from 2009-2012.

"It's based on both the work of HP Lovecraft and the life of HP Lovecraft, which we've conflated in interesting ways," says Moore. "It's set in 1919, an historically authentic world, which accounts for an awful lot of the reference material I've needed. I've got books on gay New York 1900-1920, and books on the political history of America in that period, with everyone just back from the First World War, and America slowly starting to turn into the country that it's been ever since."

You've referenced Lovecraft so many times over the years – from *Swamp Thing* to the *League* – that I'd sort of assumed that you know everything there is to know about him already…

"And so did I! But Lovecraft research has moved on, hence these towers of books. I've got Lovecraft by structuralists, I've got Lovecraft by post-structuralists – and I almost know the difference between the two. I'm putting in very heavy scripts these days!" CH

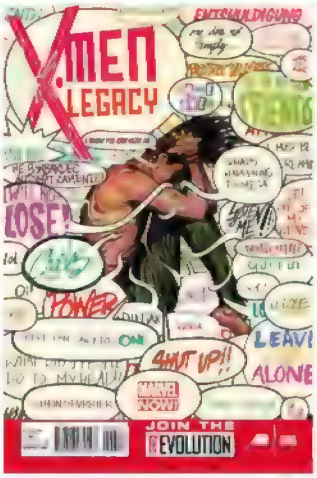
***Fashion Beast** is available now from Avatar/Titan; next up is probably **Nemo: The Roses Of Berlin** some time in 2014.*

HE IS LEGION

Well, legion may be overstating it, but Simon Spurrier is certainly a great multi-tasker. He talks to **Stephen Jewell** about *X-Men: Legacy*, new series *Disenchanted* and why folklore is ultimately about blood and sex...

SIMON SPURRIER
MARVEL NOW!
JORGE MOLINA
X-MEN LEGACY
LEGION
JOIN THE R EVOLUTION
005

SIMON SPURRIER
MARVEL NOW!
TAN ENG HUAT
X-MEN #1
LEGACY
JOIN THE REVOLUTION


X-MEN
LEGACY
LOSE!
POWER
ON
SHUT UP!!
LEAVE
ALONE
MARVEL NOW!
JOIN THE REVOLUTION

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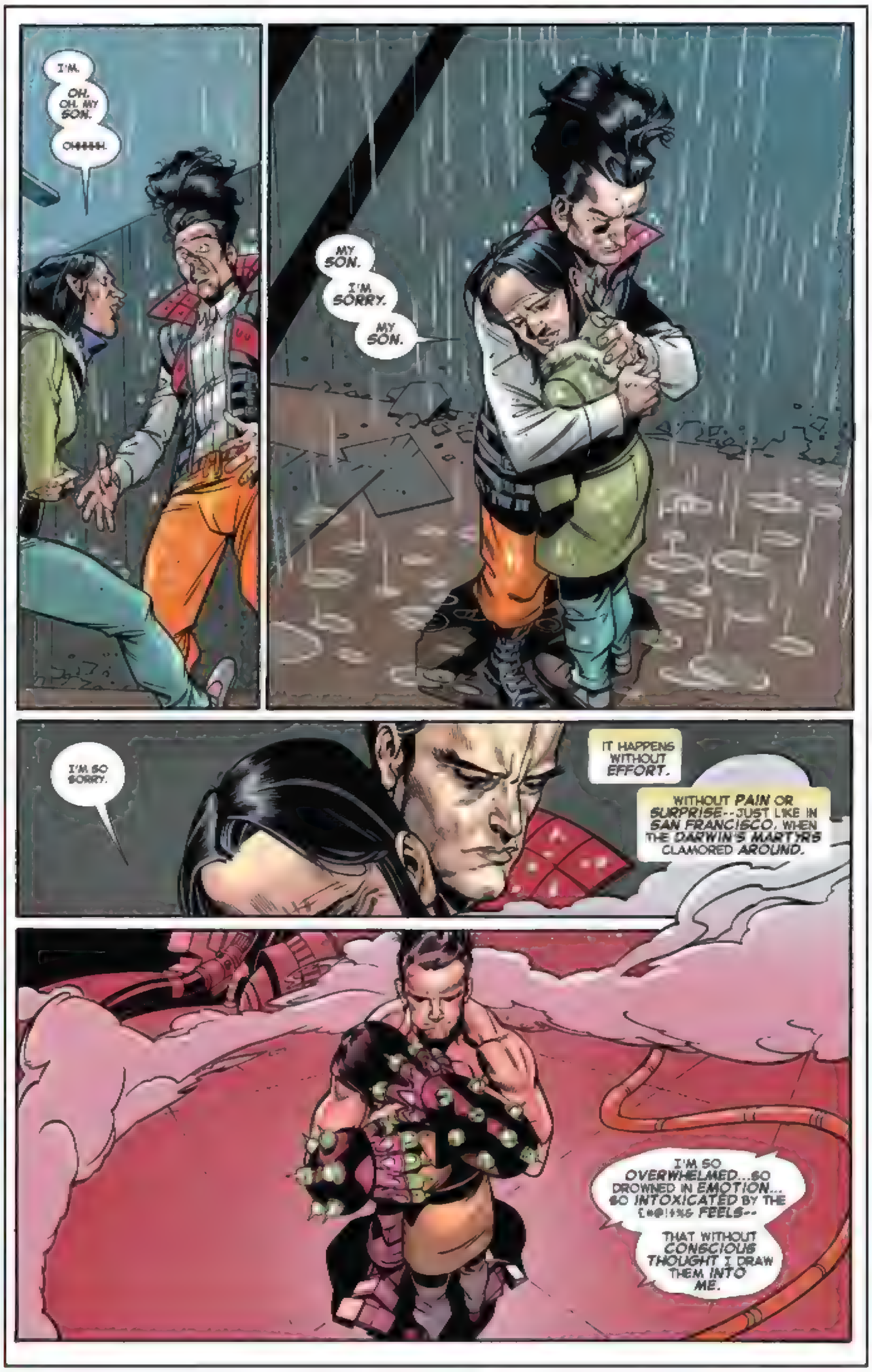
I'M.
OH. OH. MY SON.
OHHHH.
MY SON.
I'M SORRY.
MY SON.
I'M SO SORRY.
IT HAPPENS WITHOUT EFFORT.
WITHOUT PAIN OR SURPRISE--JUST LIKE IN SAN FRANCISCO, WHEN THE DARWIN'S MARTYRS CLAMORED AROUND.
I'M SO OVERWHELMED...SO DROWNED IN EMOTION... SO INTOXICATED BY THE £*@!+%$ FEELS--
THAT WITHOUT CONSCIOUS THOUGHT I DRAW THEM INTO ME.

Above: Family reunions don't quite go to plan in *X-Men Legacy*, a Marvel book with an independent vibe.

> **“I've tried to make Legion someone that other people give a damn about too”**

Currently balancing the freedom of creator-owned projects such as *Disenchanted* and *Six Gun Gorilla* with the more restrictive requirements of regularly scripting *X-Men: Legacy*, Simon Spurrier appears to be enjoying the best of both comic book worlds. But when *Comic Heroes* meets him at a pub near his Highbury home, he candidly reveals some heartfelt reservations about taking on work-for-hire assignments.

“Ideally, you should be able to pick and choose your jobs and in my case that would be creating my own characters and scenarios,” he says. “But there's something understandably very pleasant about being given somebody else's character and universe. If you're given constraints, you're required to seek out challenges and therefore you get better results.”

X-Men: Legacy focuses on Professor X's troubled son David Haller, aka Legion, and has proven to be one of the House of Ideas's most leftfield books since it launched late last year.

Building on his good work in 2012 miniseries *X-Club*, it represents Spurrier's first ongoing title for Marvel, and with 19 issues shipping over a 12-month period, he admits that he's had his work cut out.

“It's been pretty trippy thinking about it and I'm hugely conflicted about how I regard it,” says Spurrier, who hopes he has made readers invest in what has hitherto been an otherwise neglected character.

“I feel as though he used to be this character that nobody gave a shit about, who was historically used as a walking/talking plot point. I've tried to make him someone that not only I really care about, but other people give a damn about too.”

SPLIT PERSONALITY

Born out of an affair between Charles Xavier and Israeli Holocaust survivor Gabrielle Haller, David's disassociative identity disorder is at the core of his mutant abilities. With all of his numerous personalities boasting their own distinctive superpower, Legion is a multi-faceted character – in all respects.

“I decided that I was going to give him a unique voice and the really obvious manifestation of that – since he spent a lot of his youth in Scotland – was a slight Scottish twang,” laughs Spurrier. “Then it was all about clambering into his head

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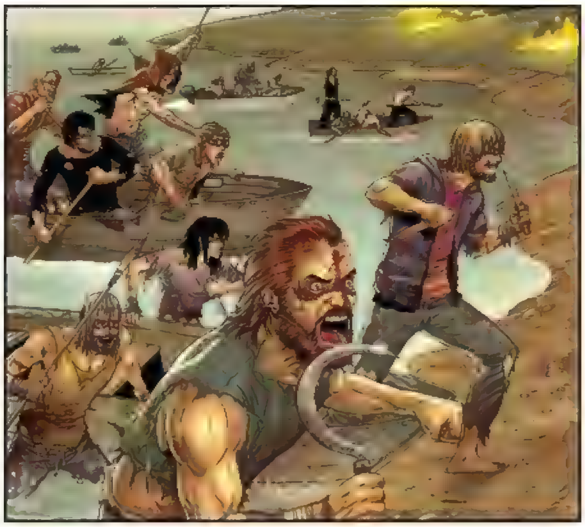
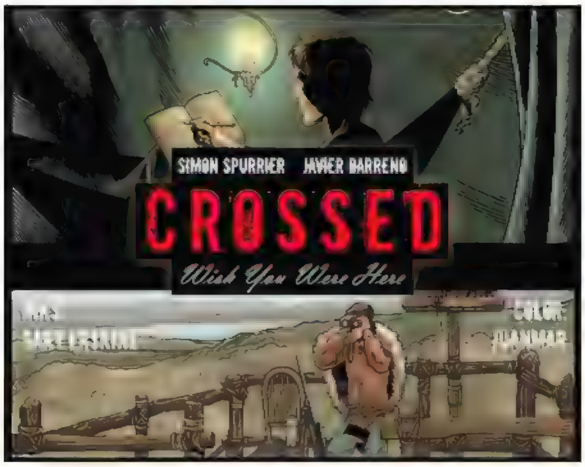
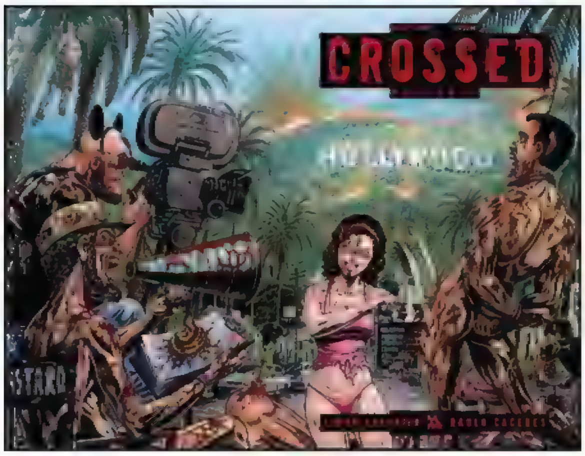
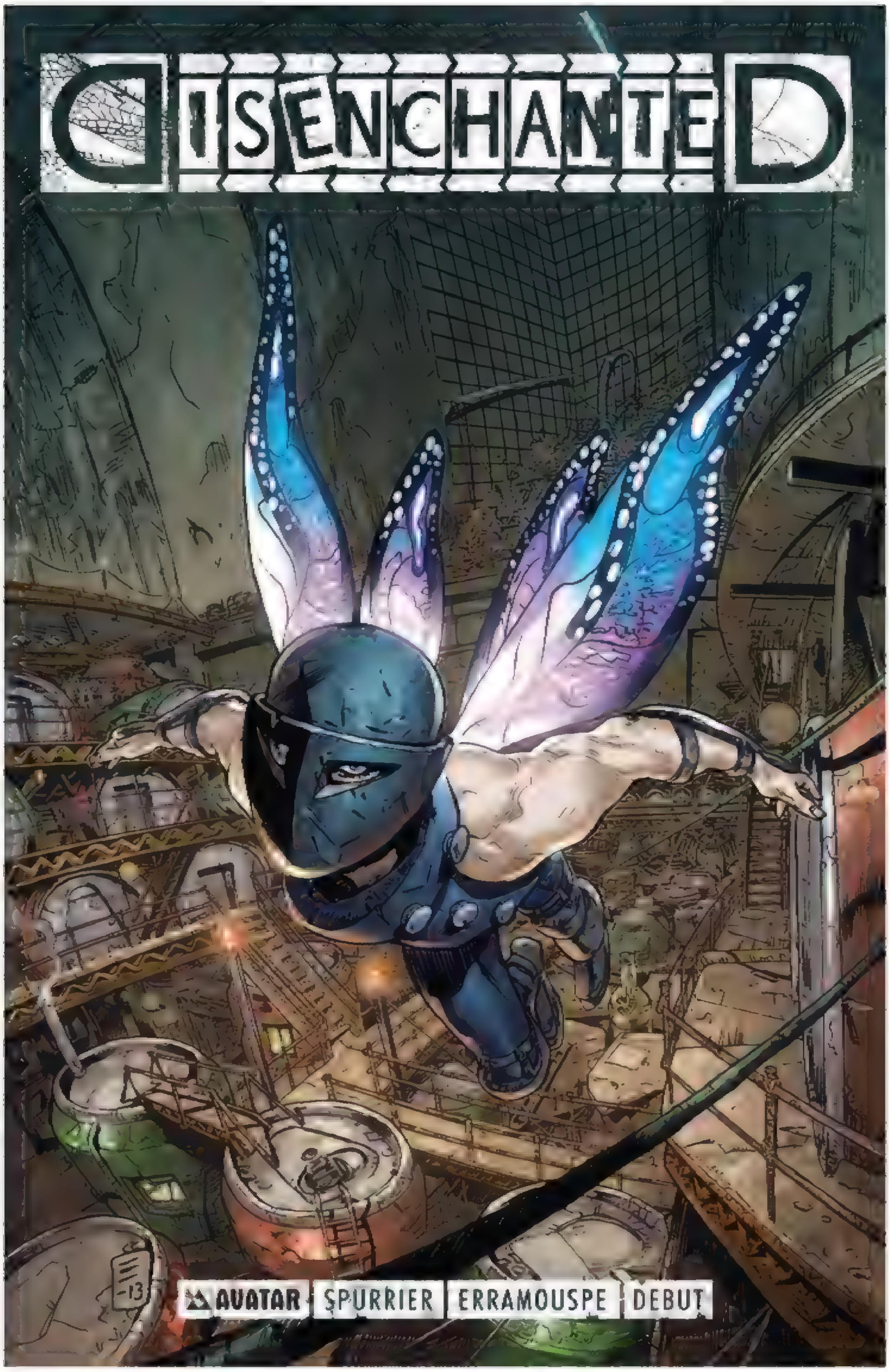








and thinking about how you'd feel if you'd lived your whole life in the shadow of this saintly beloved character, who in the one relationship that really matters to you – that is to say that he's your father – he has arguably failed utterly."

And after Professor X's death at the hands of his surrogate son Cyclops at the climax of last year's *Avengers Vs X-Men*, David will never have the opportunity to make his peace with his late dad. "He's never going to have that conversation and that drives him crazy," adds Spurrier. "And then he's got to work out how he's going to approach the world. Is he going to be the good guy, like his father, or is he going to do things differently?"

Curiously, Spurrier has been forced to play mind games with himself as he tackles the continuous, sometimes twice-monthly title. "I have issues regarding the perpetual second act," he concedes. "My central obsessions are language and story and it doesn't make sense to me to tell a story that never actually ends. My approach from the outset was to make it a modular story with a beginning, a middle and an end. After that, you can pick it up again with a completely different story and themes, which seems to have worked for me so far.

"So the first arc is David coming to terms with whether he agrees with how his father approached the world and the second half will be about putting that into effect."

Above: Like *Crossed: Wish You Were Here* – Avatar's grisly horror comic – *Disenchanted* is a free weekly web series.

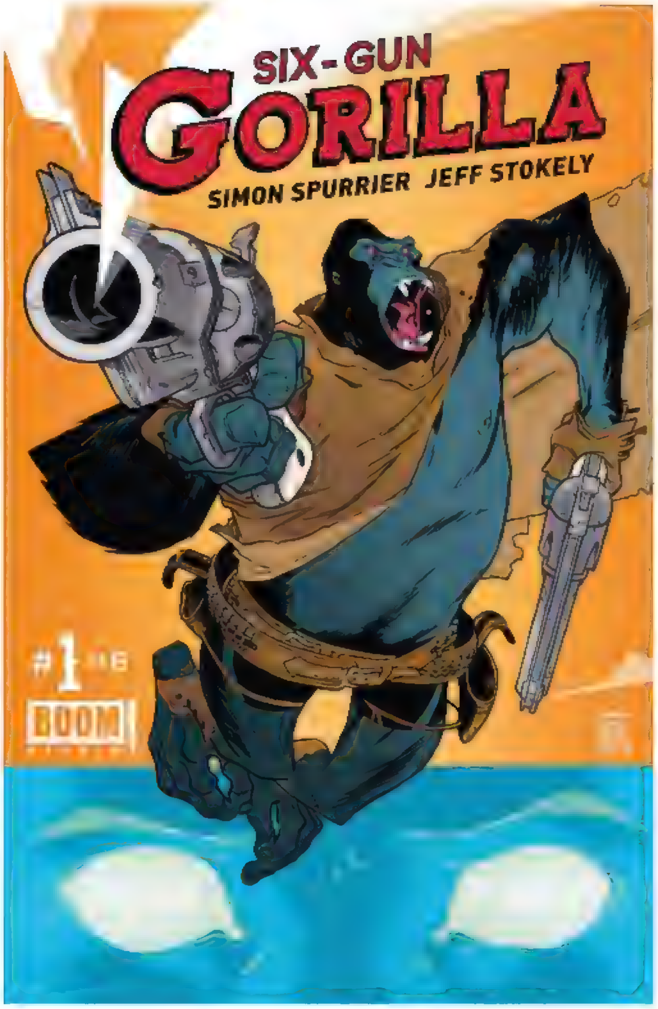
WORD POWER

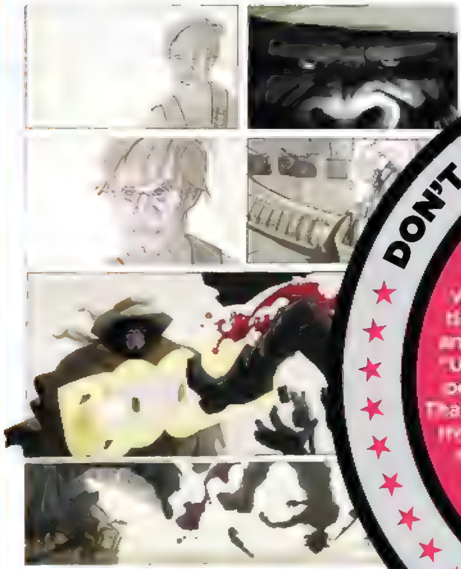
Spurrier has helmed Avatar's *Crossed* web series *Wish You Were Here* for the past 18 months, so he surely appreciates the almost limitless creative freedom that he and other leading scribes – including Alan Moore, Kieron Gillen and Jonathan Hickman – are given at the sometimes-notorious US independent?

"The very simple answer is yes," he says. "I've had discussions with Avatar boss William Christensen about how best to characterise what they do. From my perspective, I think they've struggled to escape the stigma of being a kind of slightly icky, bad girls, niche publisher, partly because aside from anything else they still do some of that stuff. But to William's credit, he realised that his greatest resource is having very good writers who don't feel constrained in any way. That doesn't mean it has to be the goriest, most offensive stuff in the world, but it does mean that you don't have someone over your shoulder saying, 'You can't do that'."

Like *Crossed: Wish You Were Here* and Warren Ellis's *Freakangels* before that, Spurrier's new series *Disenchanted* will be serialised weekly online before being collected into print editions.

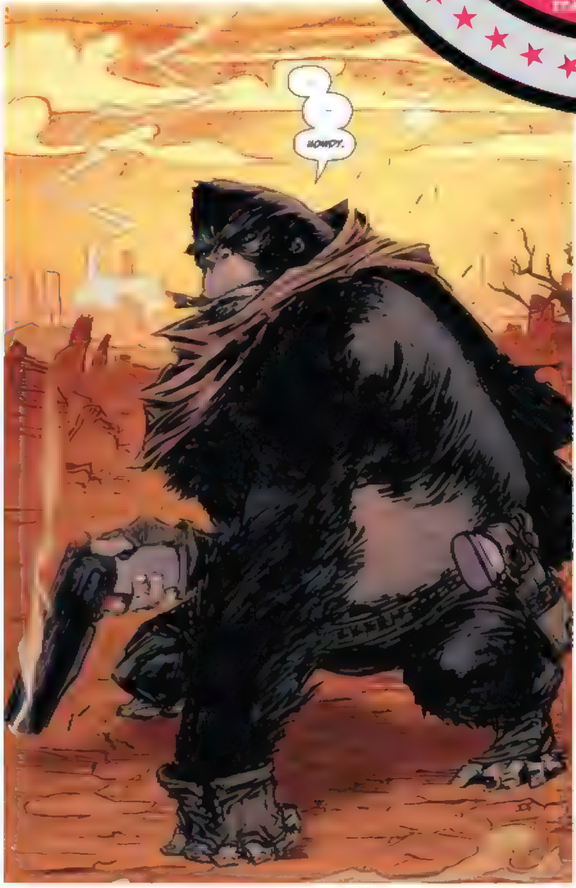
Drawn by Argentinian artist German Erramouspe, it finds him unexpectedly venturing into fantasy territory. "I couldn't really tell you where it came from

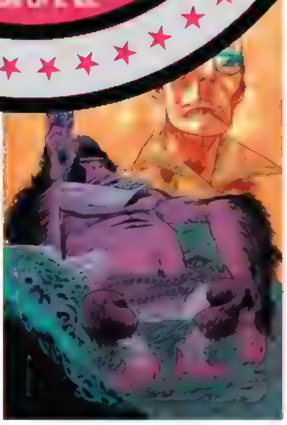




DON'T JUDGE A COMIC BY ITS NAME

Spurrier has just put the finishing touches on *Six Gun Gorilla*, his riotous six-issue miniseries for Boom! Studios with artist Jeff Stokely. "When I recently wrapped up the last issue it was the first time I've stood back from a body of work and said 'I'm really proud of that'," he says. "Unfortunately because of the title, a lot of people have written it off as silly, daft fun. That's a shame but I've kind of made a rod for my own back. It's about a lot of things that really matter to me such as storytelling which is one of my main obsessions. *Six Gun Gorilla* is a really important story about stories, masquerading as crazy sci-fi, Western fun, with a big gorilla in the middle of it all."





BOOM! STUDIOS
#2 of 6
SIX-GUN
GORILLA
SIMON SPURRIER JEFF STOKELY

BUT THEN, FOLKS... JUST WHEN WE WERE WORRYING OUR LAST GUY WAS AN ACTION-DODGER GOOD FOR NOTHING BUT TALKING--
SO I'LL. I'LL TRY AND GET THIS BACK TO THE GATE, Y'HEAR?
THIS HAPPENED:
HOWDY.

but I've always been interested in folklore," he says. "I think most British writers have an interest in that sort of thing but I also like to think that I'm healthily bored of it being regurgitated in the same old way.

"Folklore these days seems to be about sparkly fairies on a shelf in a supermarket but if you do the smallest amount of digging, you'll find that, apart from anything else, it's a way of exploring what doesn't make sense to us. It's been corrupted and appropriated but underneath it's always about blood and sex."

REALITY CHECK

A staunch atheist, Spurrier is nevertheless fascinated by society's perceived absence of spiritual character in some quarters. "Unlike some people, I don't see it in 'woe betide us' terms, but it fascinates me that the ills of the world can be associated with this slow loss of metaphysical interest that people have. I thought that if you're describing what amounts to folklore being peeled away from our lives, it's interesting to look at it from the point of view of someone who is balls-deep in folklore."

Disenchanted is set in Vermintown, a miniature metropolis built in an abandoned tube station. The story revolves around an increasingly dysfunctional family of Borrowers-esque faerie folk and references famous historical hoax The Cottingley Fairies.

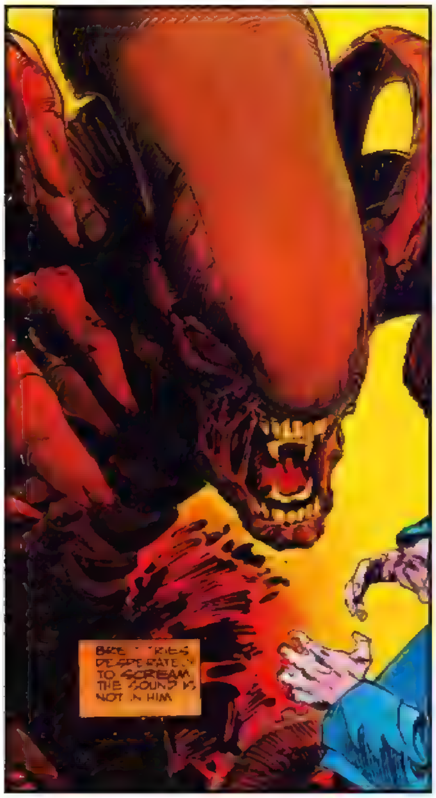
"The first episode gets that out of the way really quickly and then we fast forward to the future to find out what has become of that particular scenario," reveals Spurrier.

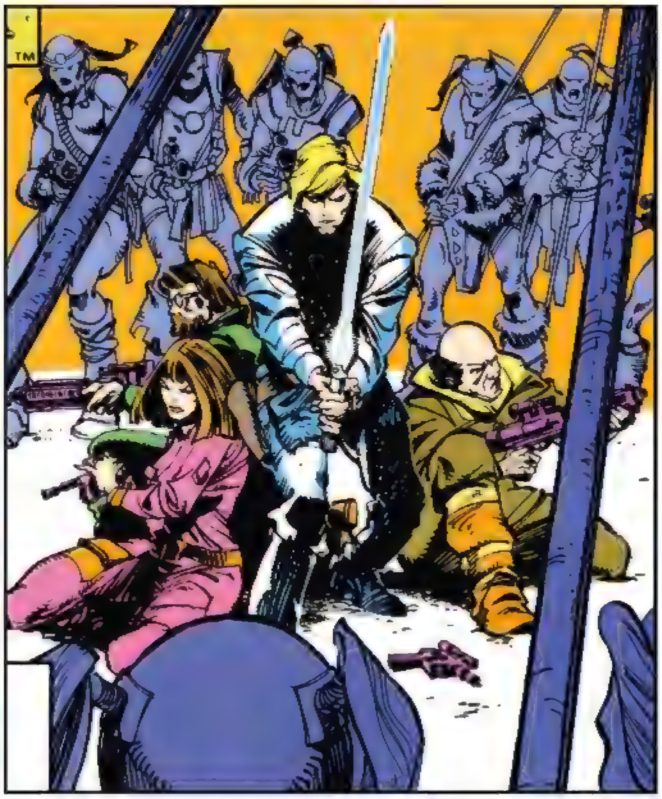
He was determined to avoid comparisons with Neil Gaiman's bestselling *Sandman* series and also keen for *Disenchanted* to stand out from other London-based urban fantasies including Gaiman's Underground adventure, *Neverwhere*. "Apart from everything else, these guys are all about an inch tall so this is not about visiting different parts of the city," he argues. "It's not really a recognisable London in those terms; it's a city made of soda cans, cereal boxes and milk cartons." CH

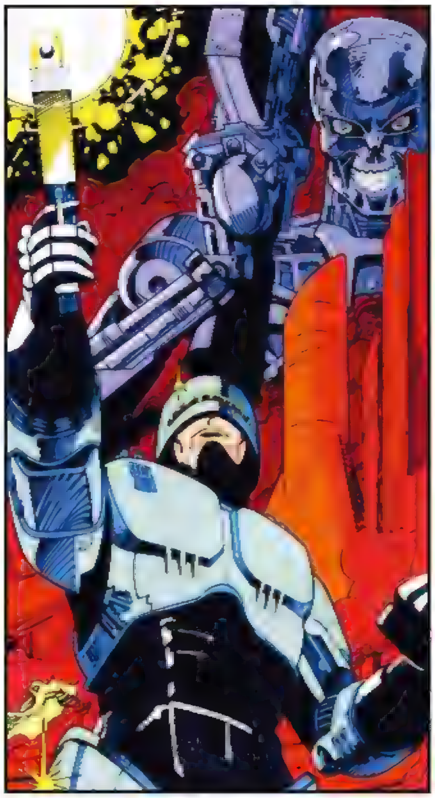
> **“Folklore these days seems to be about sparkly fairies on a supermarket shelf”**

Above: A bio-surgically modified silverback gorilla toting a pair of enormous revolvers is the star of Spurrier's six-issue miniseries for Boom!.

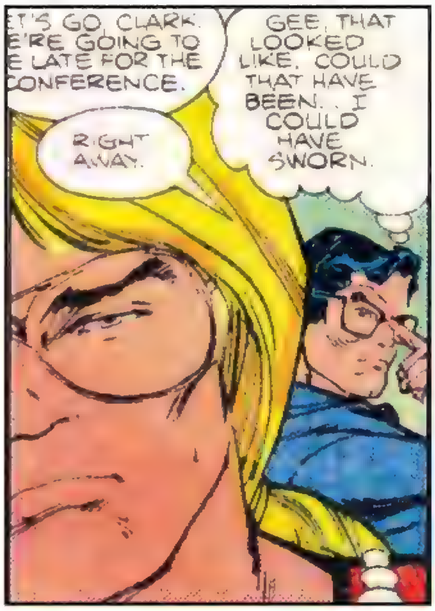
X-Men: Legacy *and* **Six Gun Gorilla** *are ongoing.* ***Disenchanted*** *is free to download, starting this month, from www.disenchantedcomic.com. A collected edition will be produced every six months or so.*

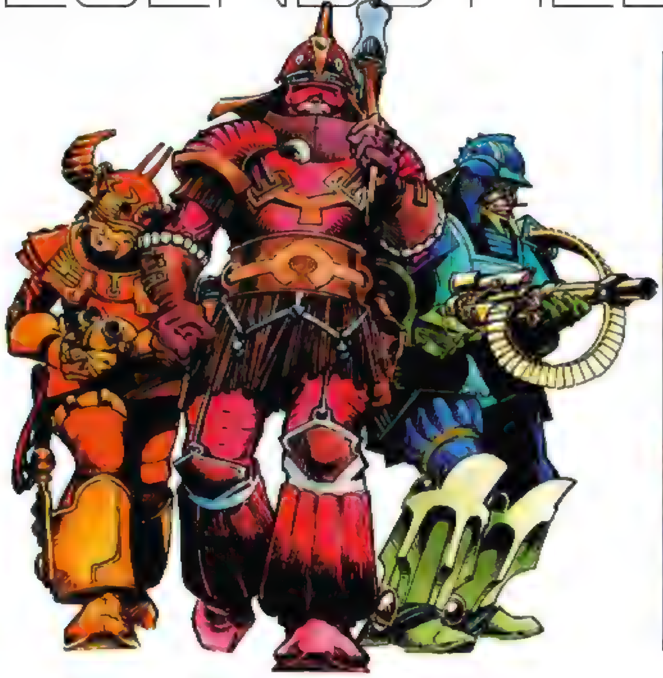

TRIES DESPERATELY TO SCREAM THE SOUND IS NOT IN HIM

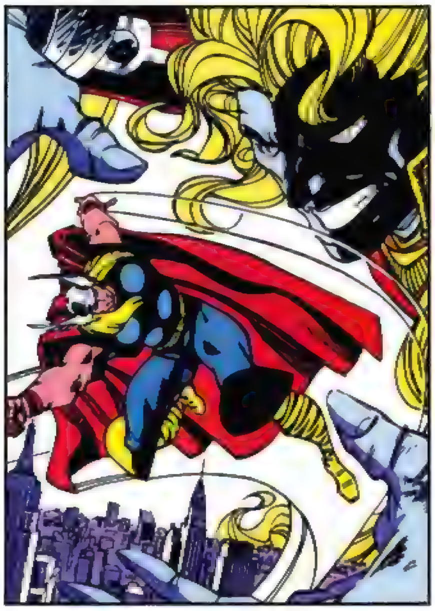




WHERE LEGENDS MEET SCI-FI

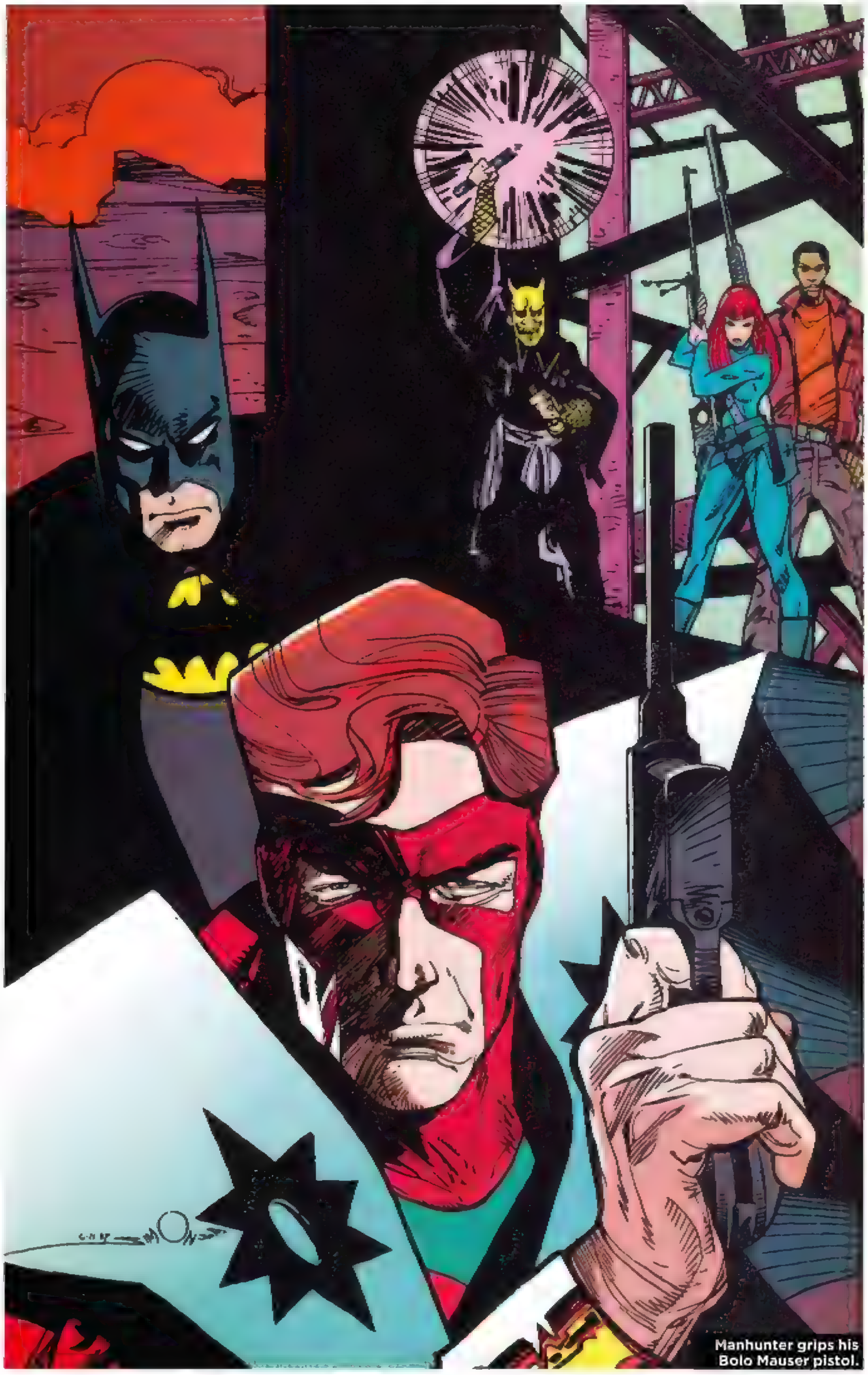

ET'S GO, CLARK. E'RE GOING TO E LATE FOR THE CONFERENCE.
RIGHT AWAY.
GEE, THAT LOOKED LIKE. COULD THAT HAVE BEEN... I COULD HAVE SWORN.





THE MULTIPLE REALITIES OF WALT SIMONSON

Joseph McCabe talks to the man who has written and drawn everything from *Alien* to *Thor* (he created *The Dark World*'s big bad no less) and knows a thing or two about combining fantasy and science fiction...



Manhunter grips his Bolo Mauser pistol.

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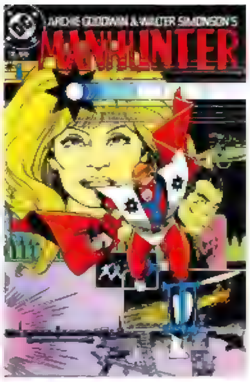
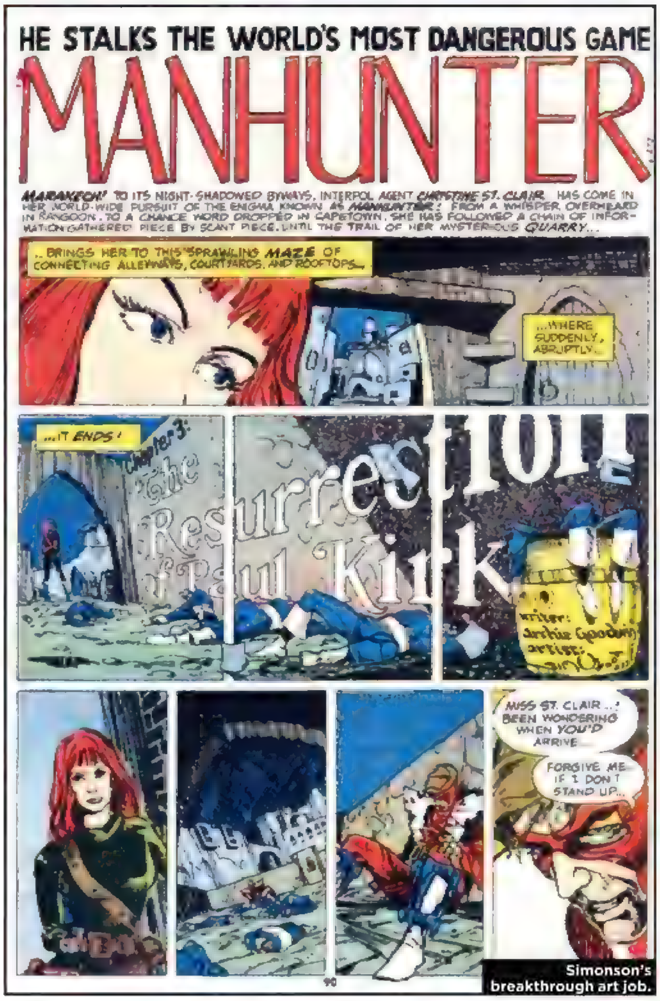

ARCHIE GOODWIN & WALTER SIMONSON'S
MANHUNTER


HE STALKS THE WORLD'S MOST DANGEROUS GAME
MANHUNTER
MARAKECH! TO ITS NIGHT-SHADOWED BYWAYS, INTERPOL AGENT CHRISTINE ST. CLAIR HAS COME IN HER WORLD-WIDE PURSUIT OF THE ENIGMA KNOWN AS MANHUNTER! FROM A WHISPER OVERHEARD IN RANGOON, TO A CHANCE WORD DROPPED IN CAPETOWN, SHE HAS FOLLOWED A CHAIN OF INFORMATION GATHERED PIECE BY SCANT PIECE, UNTIL THE TRAIL OF HER MYSTERIOUS QUARRY...
...BRINGS HER TO THIS SPRAWLING MAZE OF CONNECTING ALLEYWAYS, COURTYARDS, AND ROOFTOPS...
...WHERE SUDDENLY, ABRUPTLY...
...IT ENDS!
Chapter 3: The Resurrection of Paul Kirk
writer: Archie Goodwin
artist:
MISS ST. CLAIR...! BEEN WONDERING WHEN YOU'D ARRIVE...
FORGIVE ME IF I DON'T STAND UP...

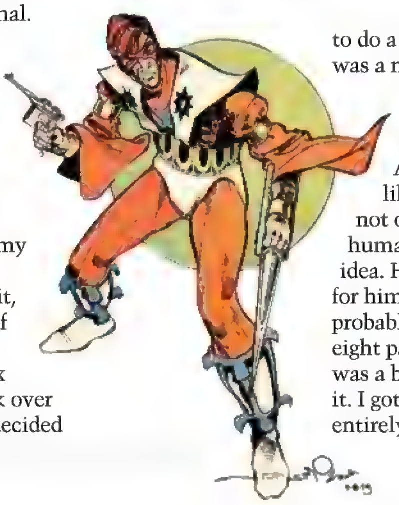
Simonson's breakthrough art job.

Few post-Silver Age mainstream comic creators are responsible for as many acclaimed works as Walt Simonson. From his breakthrough on DC's *Manhunter* strip, through his groundbreaking graphic-novel adaptation of Ridley Scott's *Alien*, to his definitive run on *Thor*, Simonson has won countless accolades for his precise, dynamic linework and his keen, unflagging storytelling. He talks about all of these and more here, and reveals the next chapter in his 40-year career…

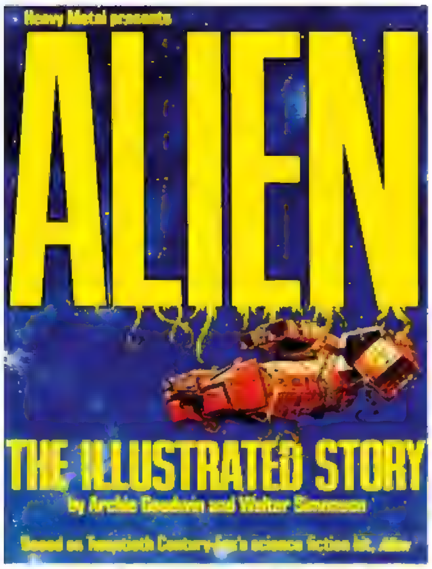
Comic Heroes: Your big comics breakthrough wasn't with a pre-existing character, but with an original creation, Manhunter. How did you make that leap so soon out of the gate?

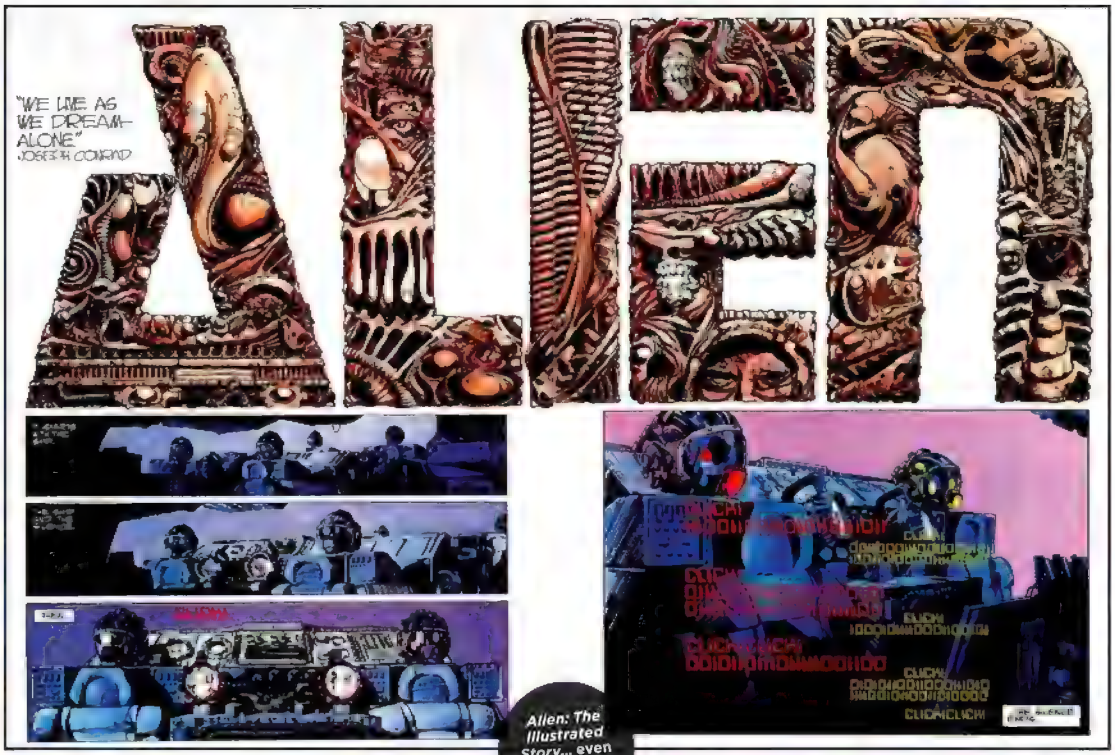
Walt Simonson: "Well, I went to the Rhode Island School of Design. While I was there, I drew a comic book called *The Star Slammers*, a black-and-white comic that I wrote and pencilled and inked and lettered. It was originally done for school, but partly as a promotion for the Washington Science Fiction Association that I belonged to. It was put on freebie tables at science fiction conventions around the country. Which meant at least people were seeing it. Over the course of two years I did about 50 pages. The early work in that is pretty decent fan work, and the later work is modestly professional. Then I used *The Star Slammers* as my portfolio when I went to New York (this would have been August of 1972). I went to DC, and, at that time, they were doing the work I was really interested in, publishing Wrightson and Chaykin and Kaluta and the *Tarzan*s that Joe Kubert was on. I ended up showing my portfolio to Carmine Infantino, who was publisher at the time. He liked it, and he saw to it that I got a couple of short stories in the anthology titles.

> **" *Manhunter* got me noticed – I got work from then on "**

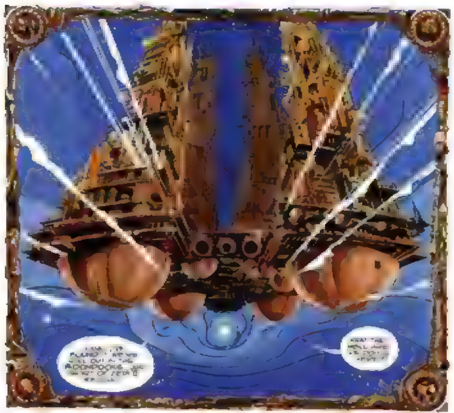


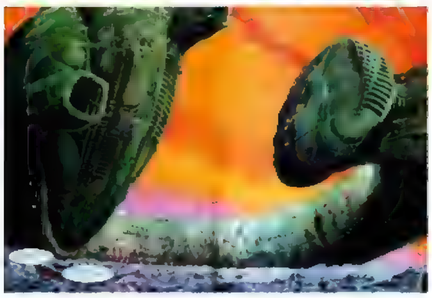
"I did back-up stories for about six months. Then Archie Goodwin took over as editor of *Detective Comics*, and decided to do a new back-up story, *Manhunter*. It was a name that DC had a trademark on, and to keep an active trademark, every so often they had to publish something with that name on it. So Archie was going to use that. Archie liked superhero characters who were not overly powerful but much more human scale, so he came up with the idea. He liked some of the work I'd done for him, and we began doing *Manhunter*, probably in March of 1973. It was only eight pages every two months. *Detective* was a bimonthly, so I could pencil and ink it. I got about a page a week done. I'm not entirely sure how I made enough money »

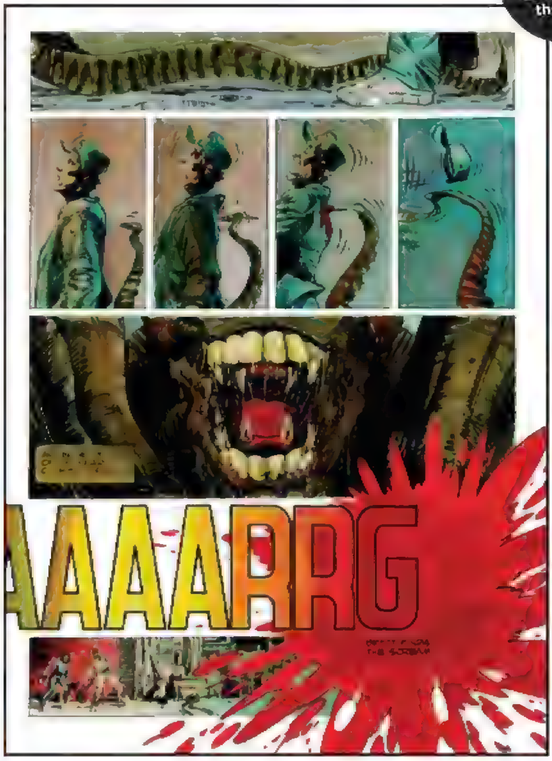

Heavy Metal presents
ALIEN
THE ILLUSTRATED STORY
by Archie Goodwin and Walter Simonson
Based on Twentieth Century-Fox's science fiction hit, Alien

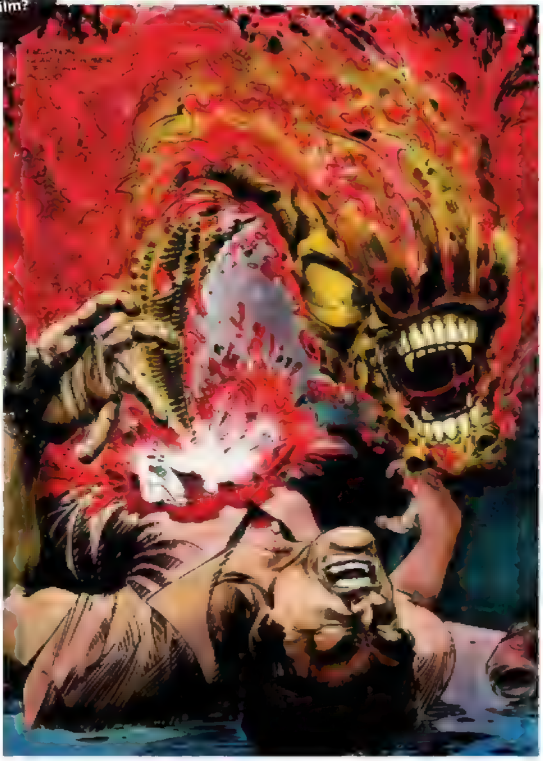

"WE LIVE AS WE DREAM— ALONE"
JOSEPH CONRAD
ALIEN
CLICK

Alien: The Illustrated Story… even better than the film?









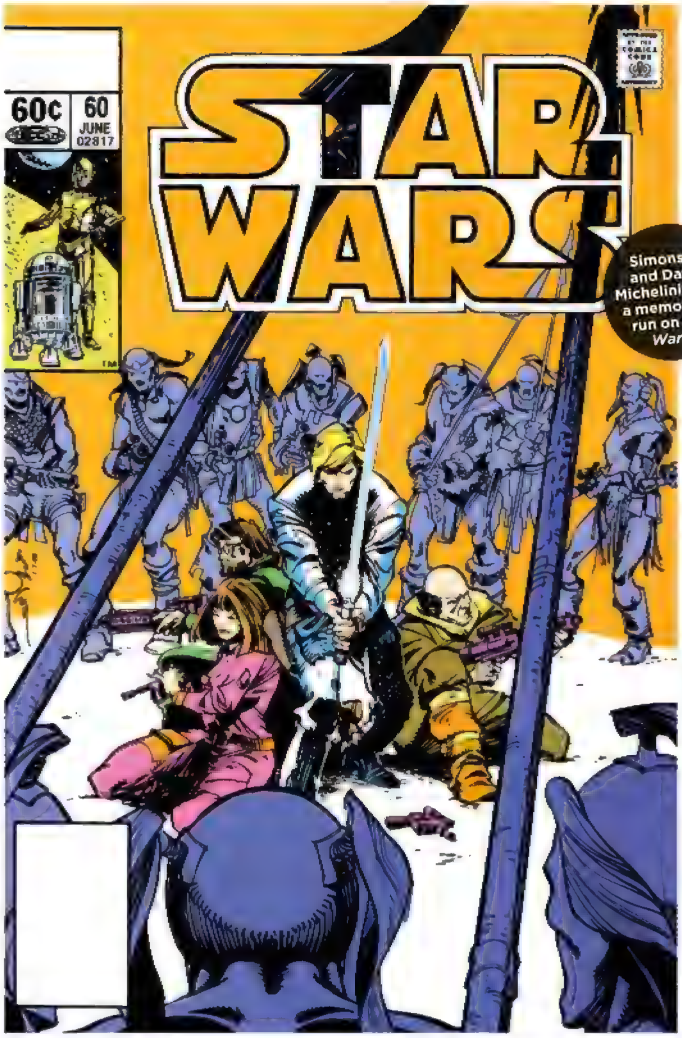
to stay alive. [Laughs.] There were only seven chapters, which meant it ran a little over a year. Around chapter four, I made some strides forward in the quality of my pencilling and inking. *Manhunter* got me noticed professionally. I was lucky to get work from then on without really having to go out and beat the bushes looking for it."

CH: A few years later, you and Archie collaborated again on *Heavy Metal*'s *Alien*.

WS: "When *Alien* came along we had to get the comic book done in time for the film to be out, in May of 1979. We were working on the comic in December of 1978. I was asked by John Workman at *Heavy Metal* if I might be game to draw it. I suggested Archie as a writer."

CH: How much information were you given?
WS: "We got a lot. *Alien* was one of the best experiences of my professional career. Back then movie adaptations were kind of less looked at by the movie people. There are a lot more hoops that you have to jump through if you do an adaptation of a movie today, a lot of likeness approvals, studio approvals. And on *Alien*, 20th Century Fox was just interested in having the comic book come out. The gentleman that we worked with, Charlie Lippincott, was a comic fan, and knew what we needed. So we were provided with a lot of visual information. We had three different revisions of the script to work from and nobody seemed to care what we did with the versions, so Archie and I tried to combine bits in order to make what we thought would be the best story. *Heavy Metal* put it out as a perfect-bound graphic novel. It kind of became a model for graphic novels in the States… We had about four months to get it done. I look back at it now and I'm astounded at the amount of work I did in that length of time."

CH: Did you get any feedback from the filmmakers? Ridley Scott was a big *Heavy Metal* fan at that time.


60¢
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JUNE
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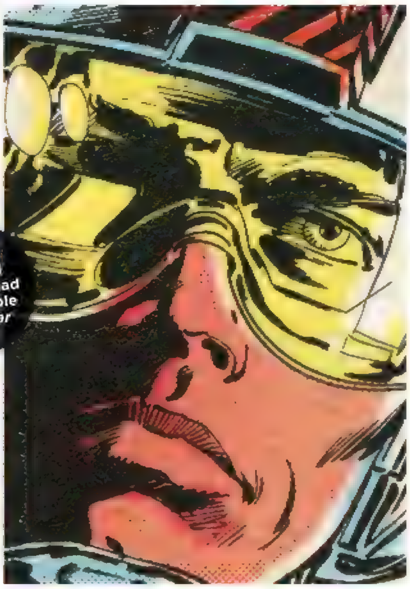
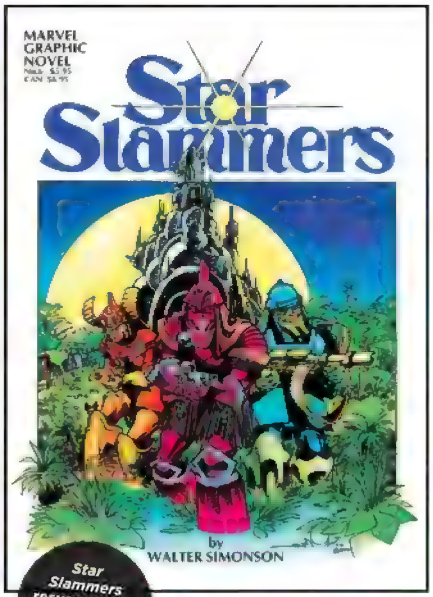
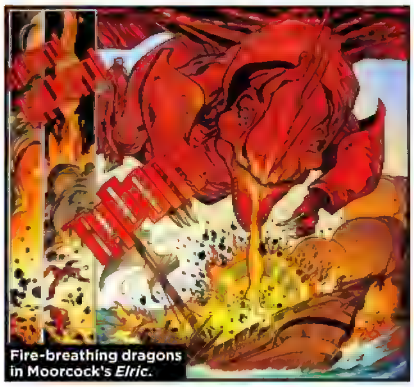
STAR WARS

Simonson and David Michelinie had a memorable run on *Star Wars*.

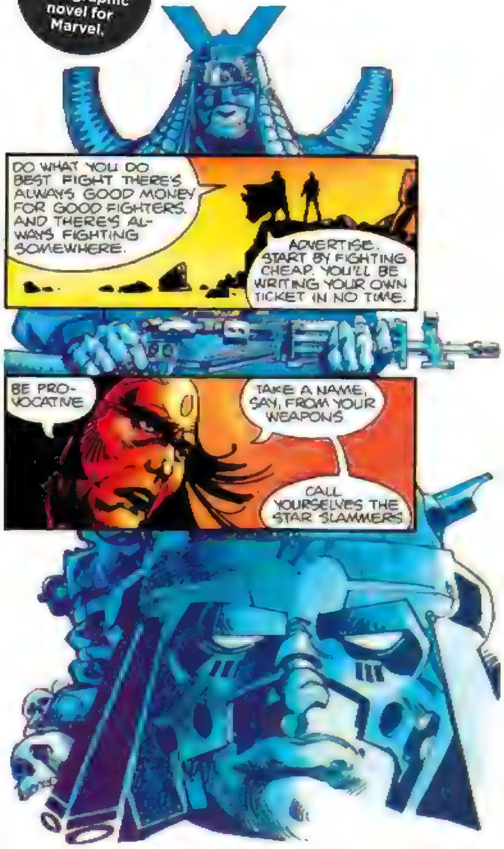


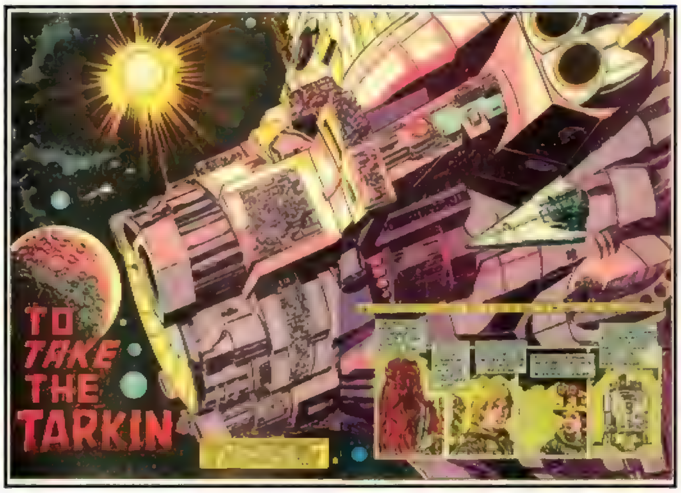

MARVEL GRAPHIC NOVEL
Star Slammers
by WALTER SIMONSON

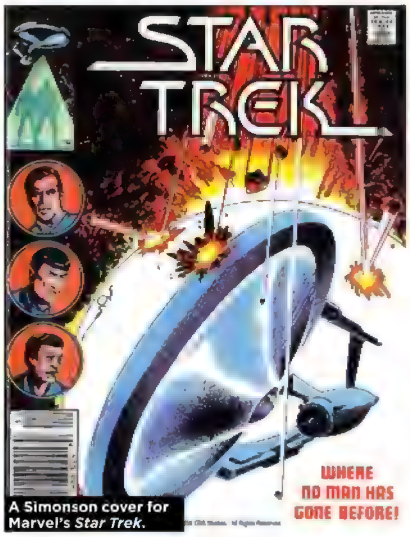
Star Slammers resurrected: a 1983 graphic novel for Marvel.



Fire-breathing dragons in Moorcock's *Elric*.


DO WHAT YOU DO BEST. FIGHT. THERE'S ALWAYS GOOD MONEY FOR GOOD FIGHTERS. AND THERE'S ALWAYS FIGHTING SOMEWHERE.
ADVERTISE. START BY FIGHTING CHEAP. YOU'LL BE WRITING YOUR OWN TICKET IN NO TIME.
BE PROVOCATIVE
TAKE A NAME. SAY, FROM YOUR WEAPONS
CALL YOURSELVES THE STAR SLAMMERS


TO TAKE THE TARKIN


STAR TREK
WHERE NO MAN HAS GONE BEFORE!

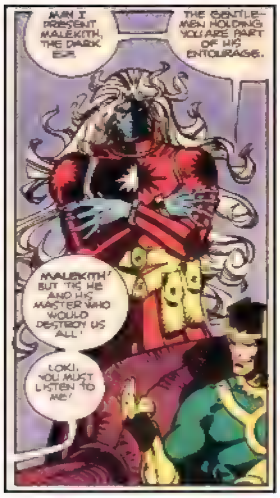
A Simonson cover for Marvel's *Star Trek*.

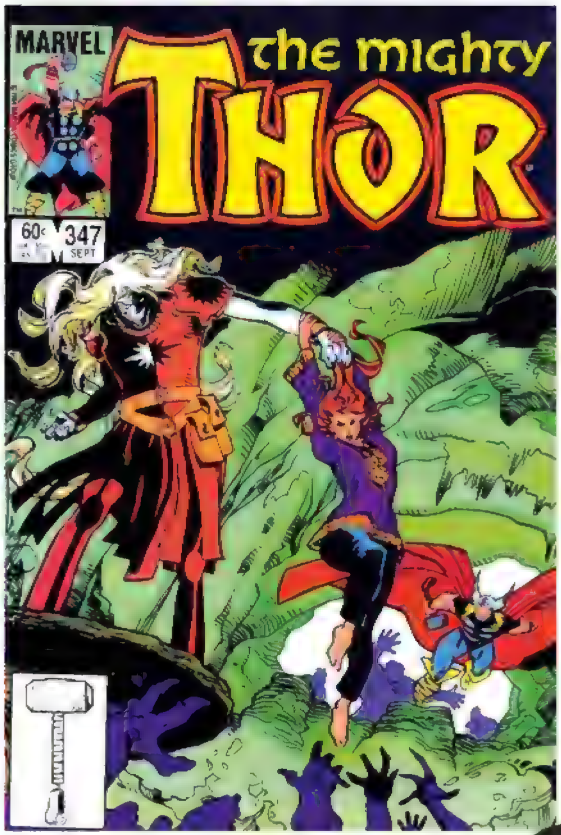
> **“ *Alien* was the first comic to make the *NYT* bestseller list ”**

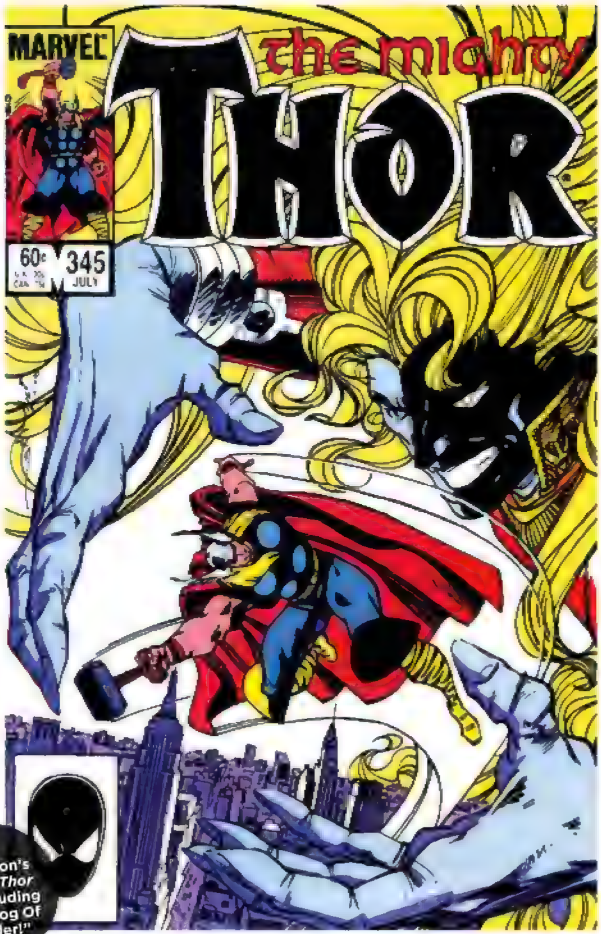
WS: “No, I never heard from any of those guys. I actually met Ridley Scott for 10 seconds. I'm sure it was the highlight of his moviemaking career. [Laughs.] I was fortunate enough to be flown to England to watch a rough cut of the film about the time I started drawing it. I was in England for about three days, given a tour of the model shop. Principal photography was all done by that time so we didn't see any of the actors. But we did see Ridley Scott and a couple of guys shooting [something] for a late part of the movie with the alien. But we didn't get any feedback from the movie company. I do know that the book made the *New York Times* bestseller list for about six weeks, back at the time when the list wasn't split up into all the different permutations we have now. As far as I know it was the first comic book to make the list. It's very helpful to have a comic and have a multimillion-dollar movie advertising it for you. We were very grateful. [Laughs.]”

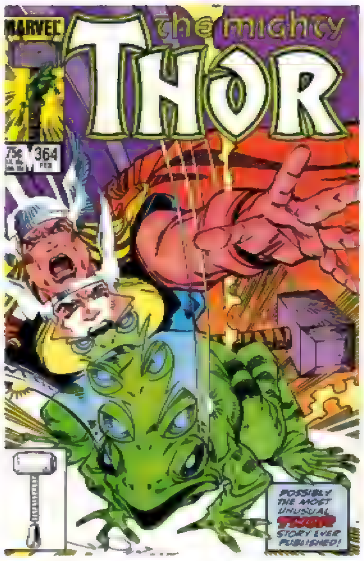
CH: You've gravitated to a number of sci-fi and fantasy worlds – *Alien*, *Star Wars*, *Elric*, as well as your own *Star Slammers* (first published by Marvel). And of course *Thor*, which you wrote and illustrated, introducing such imaginative concepts as the alien Beta Ray Bill replacing Thor, and Thor turning into a frog.

WS: “I really took the Jack Kirby and Stan Lee Thor as my model. The first Marvel comic I bought in 1965 was *Journey Into Mystery* #120. Which turned out to be the beginning of a four-issue story arc that involved Thor and Odin and Loki and the Absorbing Man. That was the longest story arc that Stan and Jack did. There's a period from around *Journey Into Mystery* #114 up to about #139 or #140, where it's Thor, the Absorbing Man, Hercules, Pluto in the Netherworld, Ego the Living Planet… One of the things I liked about it was in that run *Thor* dealt both with mythological themes but also with science fiction – the »

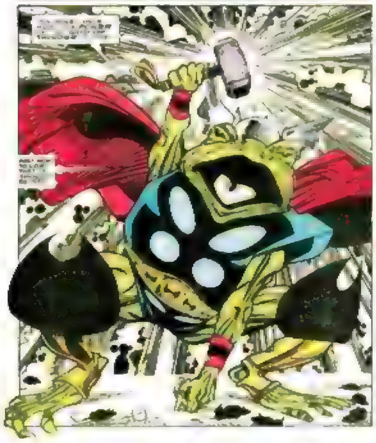

MAY I PRESENT MALEKITH, THE DARK ELF
THE GENTLEMEN HOLDING YOU ARE PART OF HIS ENTOURAGE.
MALEKITH! BUT 'TIS HE AND HIS MASTER WHO WOULD DESTROY US ALL!
LOKI, YOU MUST LISTEN TO ME!

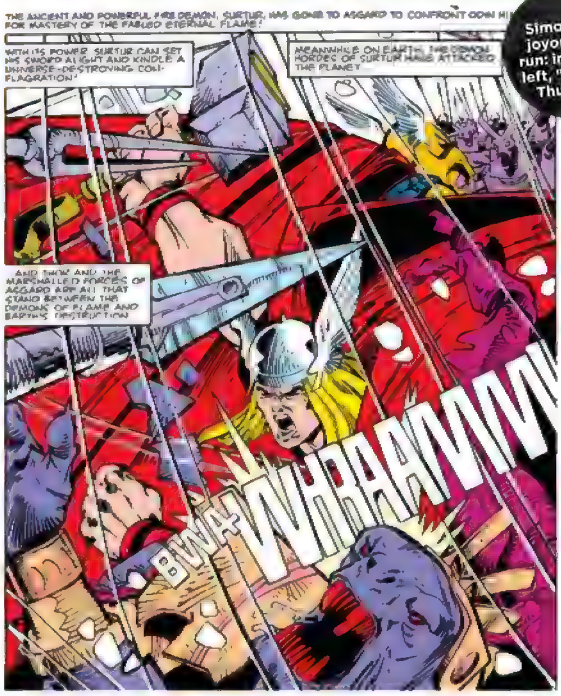

MARVEL
the mighty
THOR
60¢
347
SEPT

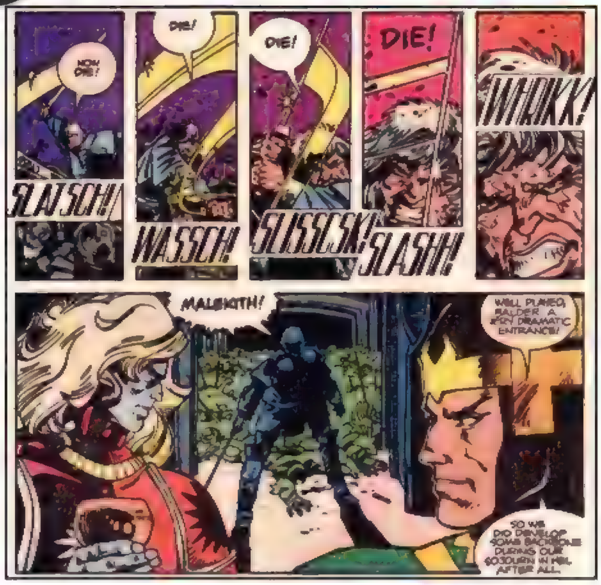

MARVEL
the mighty
THOR
60¢
345
JULY


MARVEL
the mighty
THOR
75¢
364
FEB
POSSIBLY THE MOST UNUSUAL THOR STORY EVER PUBLISHED!

Simonson's joyous *Thor* run: including left, "Frog Of Thunder!"




THE ANCIENT AND POWERFUL FIRE DEMON, SURTUR, HAS GONE TO ASGARD TO CONFRONT ODIN HI FOR MASTERY OF THE FABLED ETERNAL FLAME!
WITH ITS POWER SURTUR CAN SET HIS SWORD ALIGHT AND KINDLE A UNIVERSE-DESTROYING CONFLAGRATION!
MEANWHILE ON EARTH, THE DEMON HORDES OF SURTUR HAVE ATTACKED THE PLANET
AND THOR AND THE MARSHALLED FORCES OF ASGARD ARE ALL THAT STAND BETWEEN THE DEMONS OF FLAME AND EARTH'S DESTRUCTION
BWAWHRAAMM


NOW DIE!
DIE!
DIE!
DIE!
SLATSCH!
WASSCH!
SLISSCSK!
SLASH!
WHOKK!
MALEKITH!
WELL PLAYED, BALDER. A VERY DRAMATIC ENTRANCE!
SO WE DID DEVELOP SOME BACKBONE DURING OUR SOJOURN IN HEL AFTER ALL.

Colonizers of Rigel, the High Evolutionary. There was a tension between the Norse myths and the old views of the world, and the future in science fiction – I like that back-and-forth a great deal.

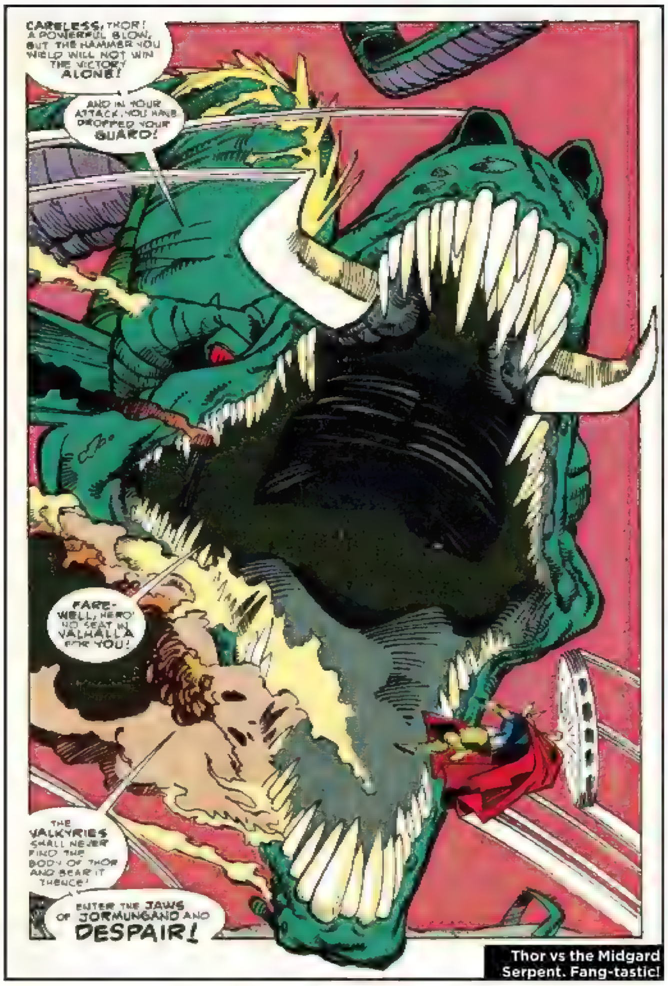
"So when I did my run on *Thor*, my basic inspiration came out of that. Beta Ray Bill, for example, was real pulp SF. The frog story was partly because I had an idea to do a tip of the hat to Carl Barks – I thought about using ducks, but that was a little too close to what I wanted to tip my hat too. And also I was reading a lot of European folk and fairytales. On the simplest level, in fairytales when the handsome prince gets transformed he gets transformed into a frog, so I thought a frog could be very cool. A lot of stuff went into it, but the basic inspiration from Stan and Jack remained."

CH: You also created Malekith the Accursed, the villain in the next *Thor* movie, *The Dark World*.

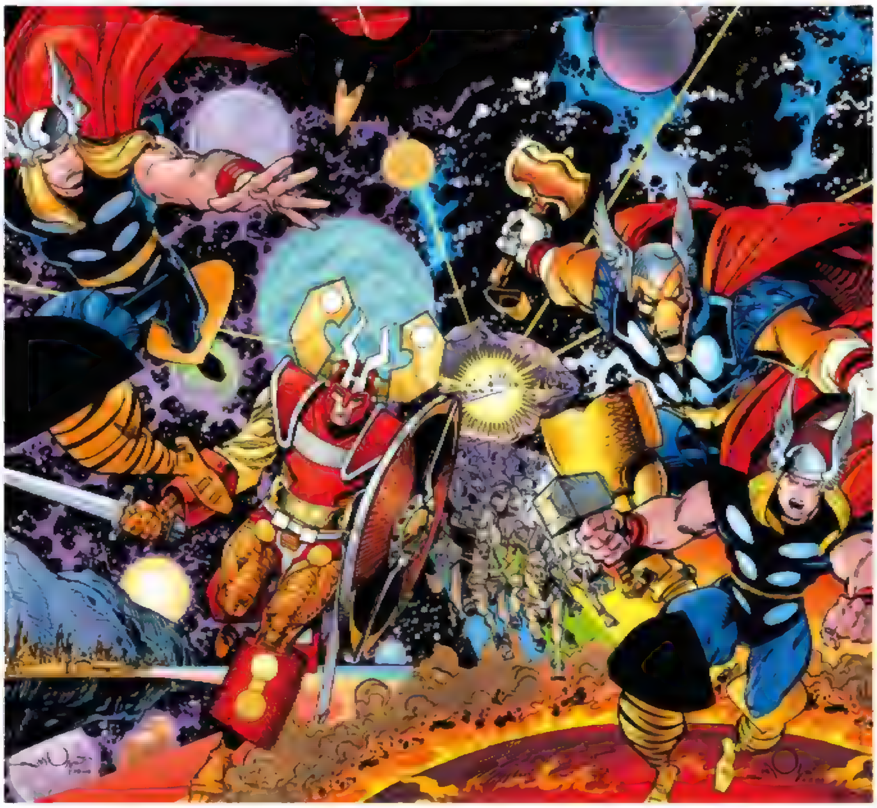
WS: "When I began writing and drawing the book, I wanted to include some stories of older characters, obviously the Destroyer and Loki, Balder, Fafnir. But I also wanted new characters, because when you have characters like that you're fairly sure your reader doesn't know where you're going… In Norse mythology there are nine worlds, one of which is the Dark Elves' home. Back in the day there wasn't much stuff out about them, so I thought they'd be cool to do a long story around. I had a long story I was working on with Surtur, a great fire demon from Norse myth, and I thought the Dark Elves would be a good stepping stone. I don't know if they had been present in the *Thor* books before that. So I invented my own version, gave them kind of a Celtic background, some of the elf homes under the hills that you get from Celtic fairytales. I combined different legends and stories from a couple of different cultures. Then you need somebody who's in front of them, who's their voice and face. Malekith turned out to be that guy."

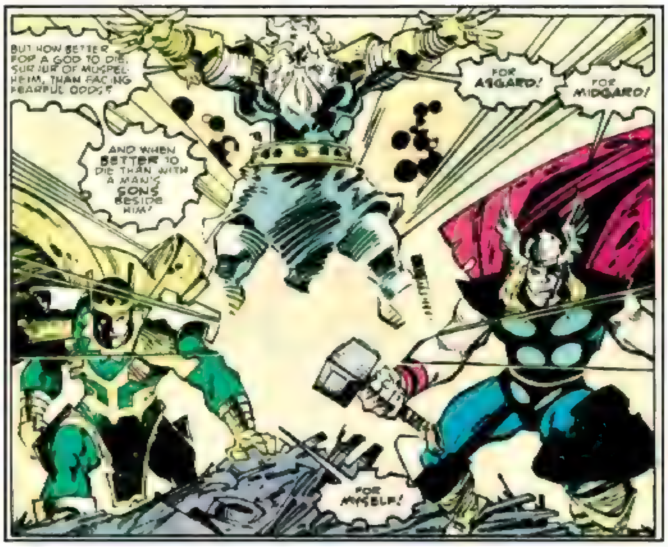
CH: You had a cameo in the first *Thor*. What did you think of the overall movie?

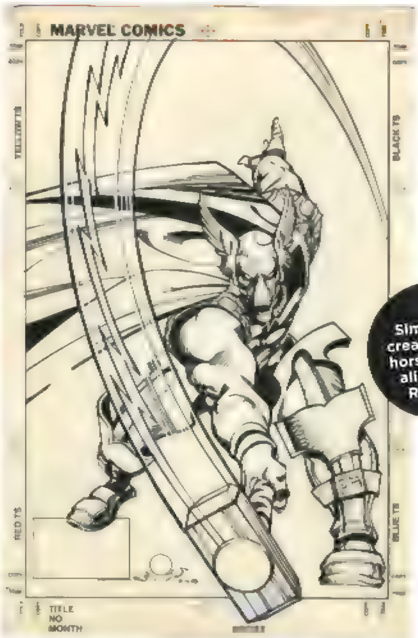
WS: "I thought it was fun. It was very sweet of them to bring us out there. [My wife] Weezie and I came out, as did my editor from those books years ago, Ralph Macchio. They had all three of us out in California on the soundstage for three days. It was a lot of fun to be part of, and I


CARELESS, THOR! A POWERFUL BLOW, BUT THE HAMMER YOU WIELD WILL NOT WIN THE VICTORY ALONE!
AND IN YOUR ATTACK, YOU HAVE DROPPED YOUR GUARD!
FARE-WELL, HERO! NO SEAT IN VALHALLA FOR YOU!
THE VALKYRIES SHALL NEVER FIND THE BODY OF THOR AND BEAR IT THENCE!
ENTER THE JAWS OF JORMUNGAND AND DESPAIR!

Thor vs the Midgard Serpent. Fang-tastic!




BUT HOW BETTER FOR A GOD TO DIE, SURTUR OF MUSPELHEIM, THAN FACING FEARFUL ODDS?
AND WHEN BETTER TO DIE THAN WITH A MAN'S SONS BESIDE HIM!
FOR ASGARD!
FOR MIDGARD!
FOR MYSELF!


MARVEL COMICS
YELLOW 75
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RED 75
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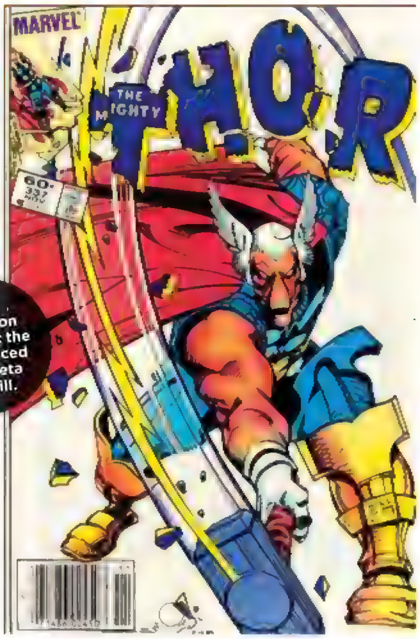
MONTH


MARVEL
THE MIGHTY THOR
60¢
337

A Simonson creation: the horse-faced alien Beta Ray Bill.

enjoyed the movie when it came out. The next movie, *The Dark World*, I haven't seen much of. Mostly I try to avoid seeing too much about stuff that I want to go catch in the theatre. My real hope is that it's well written. I'm sure it will look cool, I'm sure the actors will look great, and I hope the writing is well done."

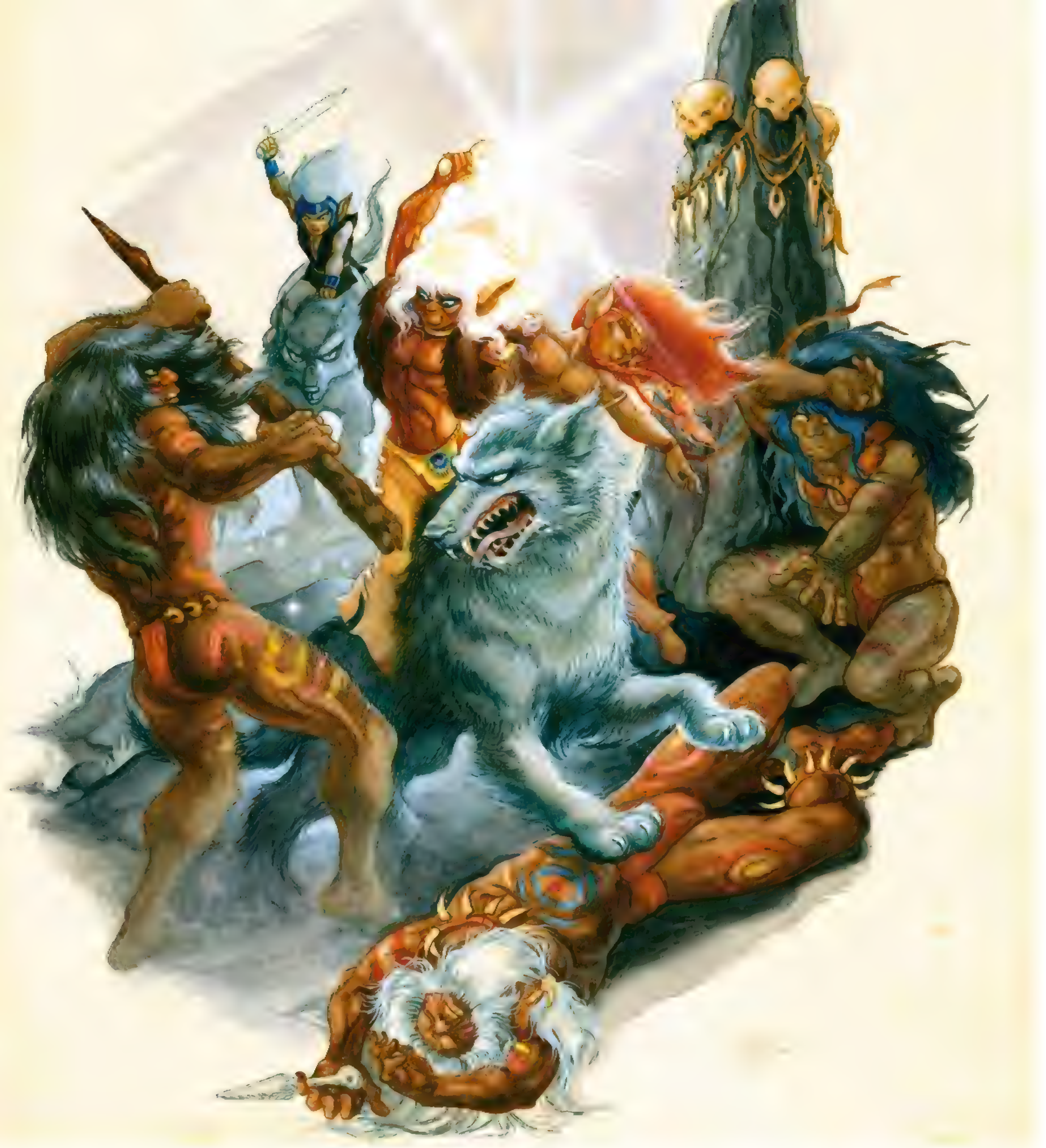
CH: As on *Thor*, were you inspired by Kirby's work – in this case *The New Gods* – when you did Orion?

WS: "Jack's *Fourth World* stuff is probably my favourite. Jack's writing was becoming as abstract as his drawing at that point, but I loved it. It had a power and energy that was tough to match elsewhere. Jack was doing four comics – *The New Gods*, *Forever People*, *Mister Miracle* and *Jimmy Olsen* – tied together into a great picture of a cosmic war. I hadn't seen anybody do anything like that before or since. I had no aspirations to reach that lofty goal. But I like the character of Orion. I tried to become as off-the-wall as I could because Jack's stuff was completely off-the-wall, and yet coherent at the same time. And I tried to reach out beyond myself in a way that I hadn't before. I had a great time. I loved doing that book."

CH: What are you up to now? Can you talk about your next projects?

WS: "I'm doing a short *Aesop's Fable* for NBM. I'm doing a short for one of the *X-Men* anniversary issues. And really what I've got planned is a creator-owned book called *Ragnarok*. I'm going back to my Norse roots for the first time in a while. IDW is publishing it and it will be coming out some time next year. I've just started drawing now. I've done a lot of writing on it, but I've still got a lot to do. On my official Facebook page, one of the galleries is called *Ragnarok*. You'll see a bunch of preliminary drawings. I'm still working out a lot of visual ideas, but that'll give you a sense of what I'm thinking about." CH

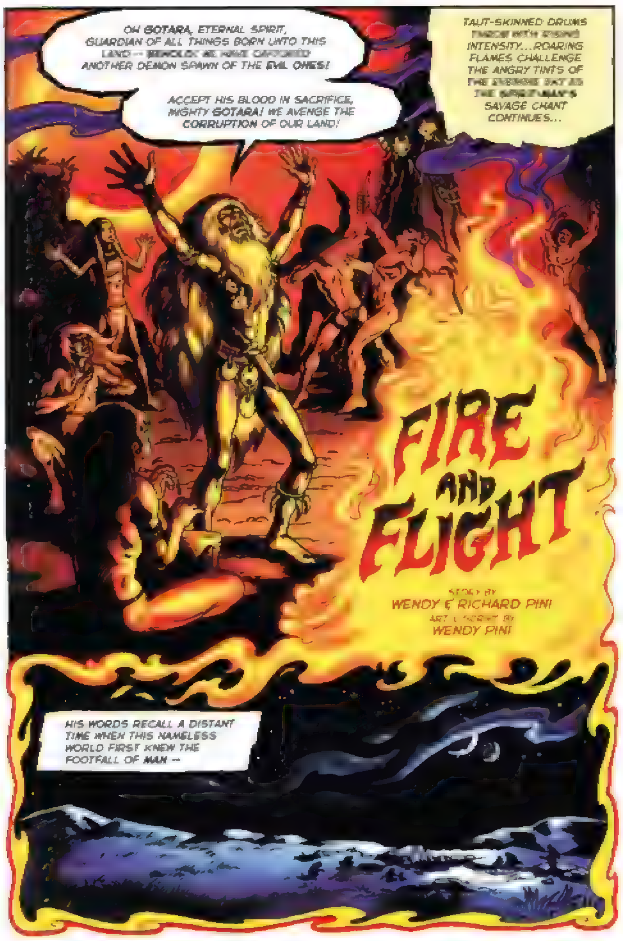
> **“I'm going back to my Norse roots for the first time in a while”**

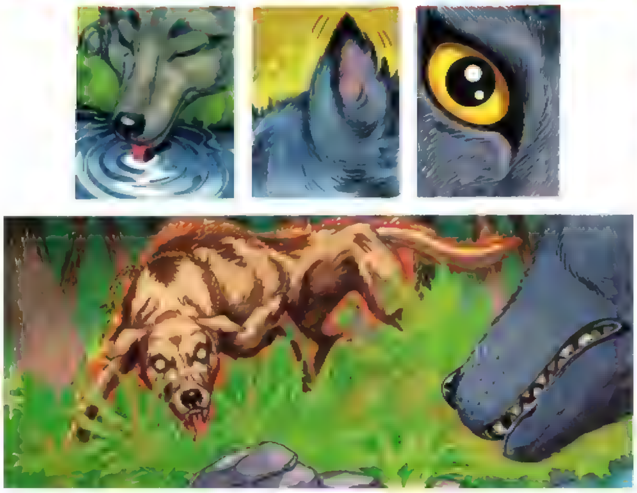


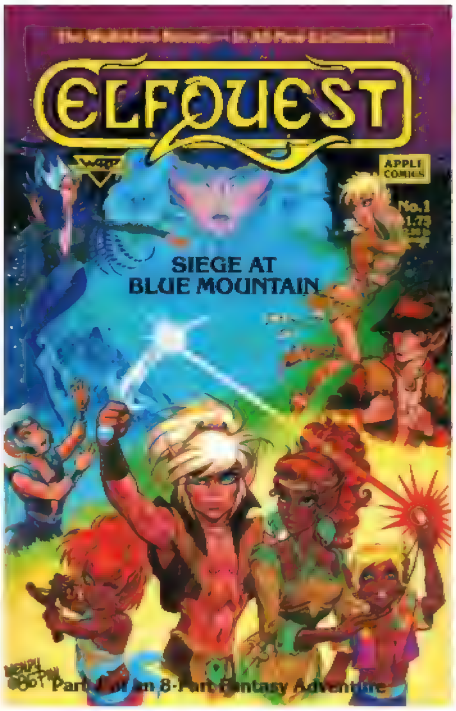
Elfquest art © 2013 Warp Graphics, Inc

PINI, VIDI, VICI

From its roots in the independent comics scene of the 1970s, *Elfquest* has risen to iconic status and its *Final Quest* will soon be published by Dark Horse. **Dave Bradley** quizzes its founders about 35 years of epic fantasy...


OH GOTARA, ETERNAL SPIRIT, GUARDIAN OF ALL THINGS BORN UNTO THIS LAND -- BEHOLD! WE HAVE CAPTURED ANOTHER DEMON SPAWN OF THE EVIL ONES!
ACCEPT HIS BLOOD IN SACRIFICE, MIGHTY GOTARA! WE AVENGE THE CORRUPTION OF OUR LAND!
TAUT-SKINNED DRUMS THROB WITH RISING INTENSITY... ROARING FLAMES CHALLENGE THE ANGRY TINTS OF THE EVENING SKY AS THE SPIRIT-MAN'S SAVAGE CHANT CONTINUES...
FIRE AND FLIGHT
STORY BY WENDY & RICHARD PINI
ART & SCRIPT BY WENDY PINI
HIS WORDS RECALL A DISTANT TIME WHEN THIS NAMELESS WORLD FIRST KNEW THE FOOTFALL OF MAN --




ELFQUEST
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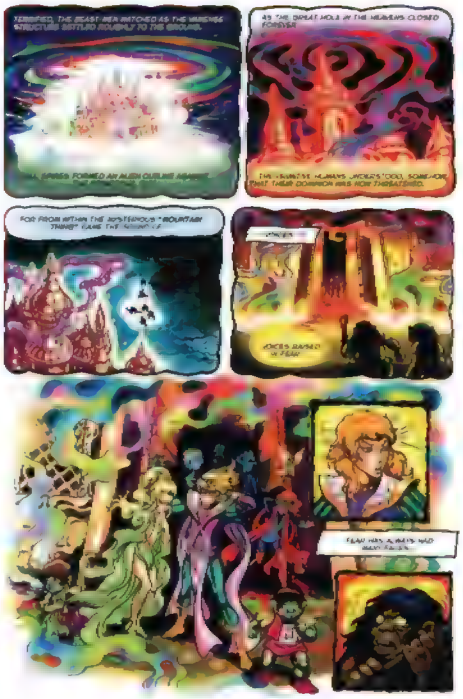
APPLE COMICS
No.1
SIEGE AT BLUE MOUNTAIN
Part 1 of an 8-Part Fantasy Adventure



LEGACY AND INSPIRATION

When *Elfquest* launched, the independent comics movement was in its infancy, meaning the field was wide open for Wendy and Richard Pini to try something new. "We had almost no competition!" confesses Richard. "The field was so fertile and we grew in it. If we were trying to do *Elfquest* now with digital, with apps, with all the new technologies, I don't know if we'd be able to have the same impact. We're so happy that we're old fogies in this business, because we had that advantage. So we're very interested to see what newcomers do."

But today's comics scene neophytes do not have quite the same open goal. Says Wendy: "I will advise people to try launching their product on the web first to build their audience interest. I see a similar spirit that's happening in web comics that was happening in the '70s with independent comics."

After so long it's only natural that Wendy and Richard Pini would be an inspiration to a whole generation of comic creators, a phenomenon Richard describes as "the best part of the job." He tells us: "People who are big names in movie and TV come up to Wendy and say 'I'm here because of what you did.' Chris Sanders who created *Lilo And Stitch* said we were a seminal inspiration. You just reel back at the connections you never knew you made. Greg Weisman who created the *Gargoyles* TV series grew up reading *Elfquest* – and there's a lot of *Elfquest* influence in that show."

With not a single note of sadness, the pair reveal: "Early on we decided never to have biological children, but all of these people, they are like our kids. The whole audience are our kids and there's nothing like it."

In a world where "comics" is often shorthand for "superheroes", one title has consistently shown that epic fantasy has a place at the heart of the industry. Wendy and Richard Pini have been creating *Elfquest* for 35 years, inspiring generations of readers, artists and writers. The pair met and married when Richard read a letter Wendy had published in issue five of the *Silver Surfer* comic book, and together they took a punt on Wendy's idea for a fantasy series. Launched in 1978, it describes a community of elves struggling to survive on an Earth-like world with two moons.

Now published by Dark Horse, their *Final Quest* is going to take "three or four years" to finish, although a one-shot prologue is available now. As well as its creator-owned roots and longevity, what marks the comic as special is that it's still run by the same couple and it always had a story arc, a direction. So what can the two creators reveal to *Comic Heroes* about their methods and processes?

Comic Heroes: How did you originally come to launch *Elfquest*?

Richard Pini: "Wendy's been a storyteller and an artist all her life. In 1977 she shared an amazing idea with me, which was the genesis of *Elfquest*. We didn't know anything about publishing; we wanted someone else to publish it! We took it to Marvel and DC but none of them wanted it, so we realised we had to do it ourselves. So we set about simply learning, making mistakes.

Wendy Pini: "I had one advantage – I had a reputation for being a science fiction illustrator. Phil Seuling was our East Coast distributor and Bud Plant our West Coast distributor and both knew me. So I think they were much more willing to take a chance on an independent comic with large numbers..."

> **"We were young and we didn't know what we were doing"**

Above: *Elfquest* #1 *Fire And Flight* is where it all began in 1978 – the first tale of the Wolfriders. The second volume, *Siege At Blue Mountain* came out almost a decade later in 1987, originally in black-and-white, later coloured.

RP: We started out with 10,000 when everyone else was selling in the hundreds! Bob and Phil, bless them both, were willing to on the strength of her reputation to take that large number and it just sky-rocketed from there."

CH: When you look back at those first issues, do you think you would do it

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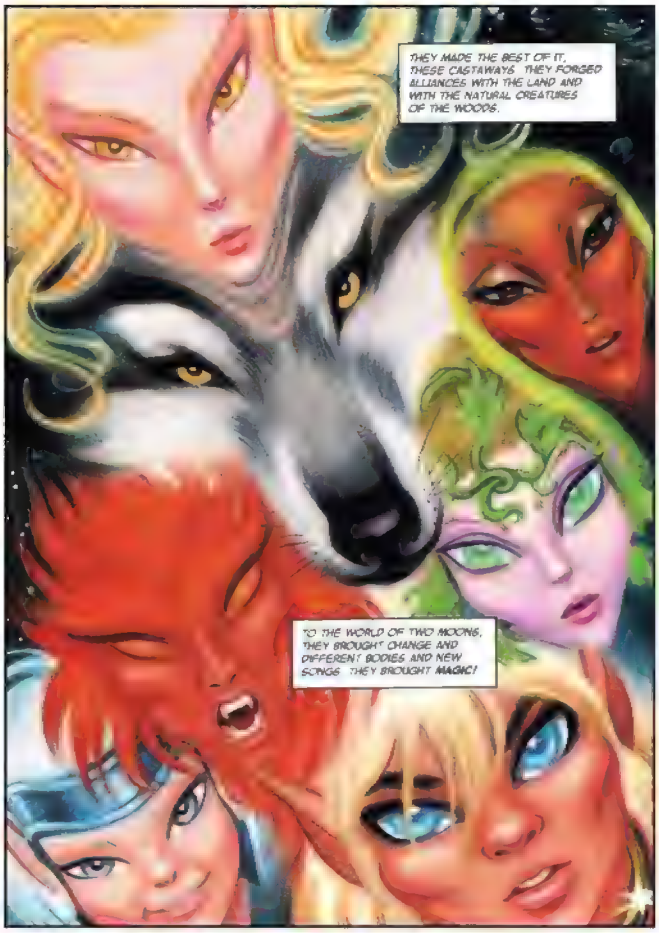
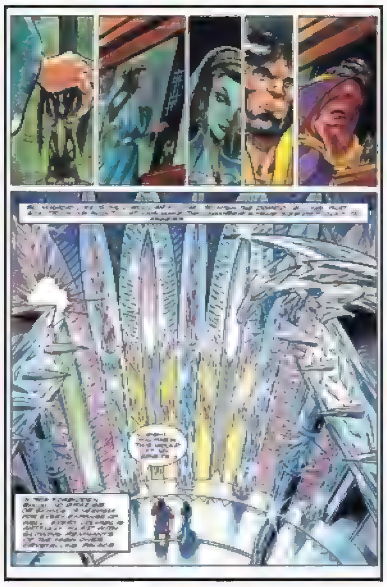
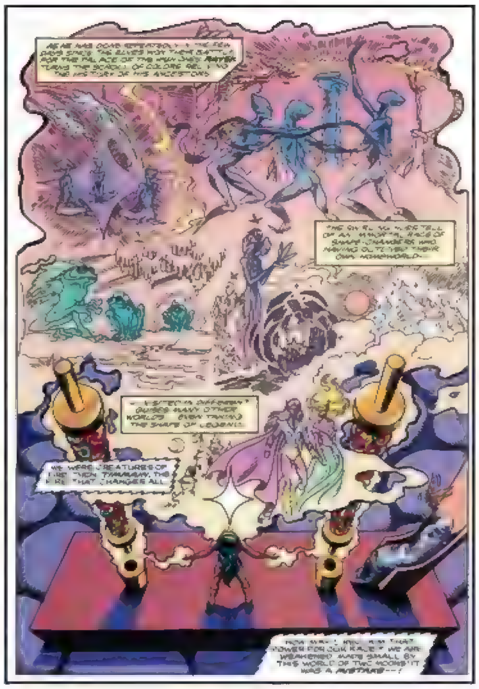
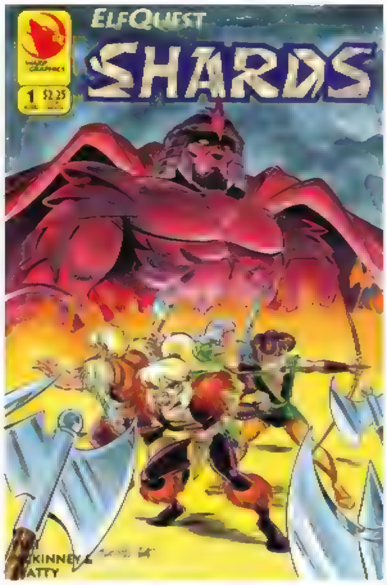
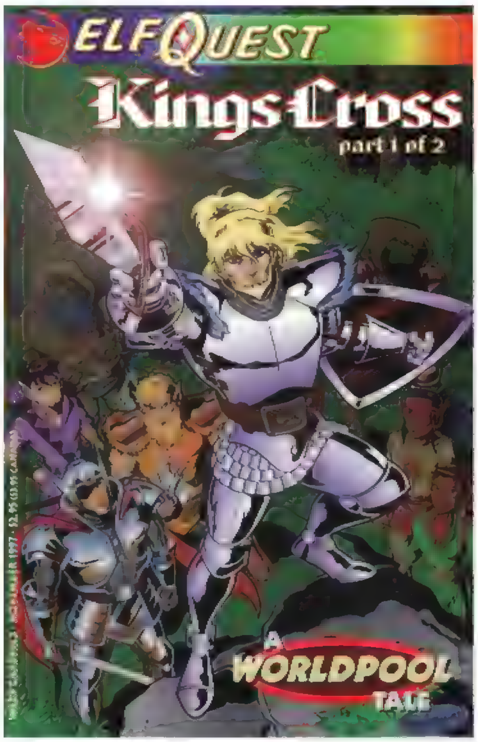
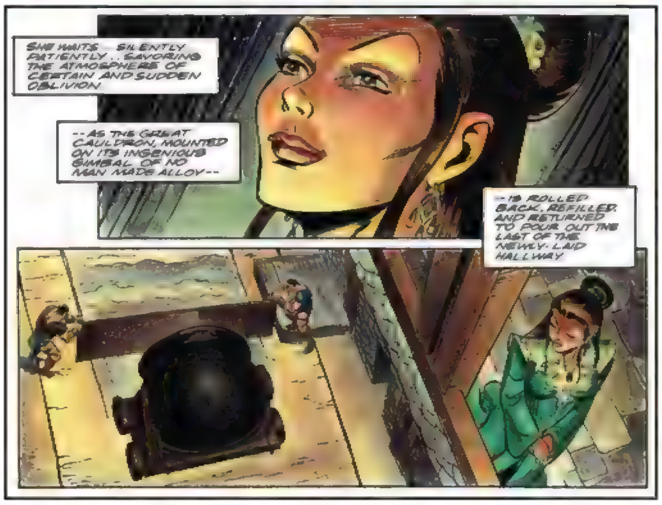

THEY MADE THE BEST OF IT, THESE CASTAWAYS. THEY FORGED ALLIANCES WITH THE LAND AND WITH THE NATURAL CREATURES OF THE WOODS.
TO THE WORLD OF TWO MOONS, THEY BROUGHT CHANGE AND DIFFERENT BODIES AND NEW SONGS. THEY BROUGHT MAGIC!






ELFQUEST
SHARDS
1 $2.25
KINNEY
ATTY


ELFQUEST
Kings Cross
part 1 of 2
A WORLDPOOL TALE


SHE WAITS SILENTLY, PATIENTLY, SAVORING THE ATMOSPHERE OF CERTAIN AND SUDDEN OBLIVION
--AS THE GREAT CAULDRON, MOUNTED ON ITS INGENIOUS GIMBAL OF NO MAN MADE ALLOY--
--IS ROLLED BACK, REFILLED AND RETURNED TO POUR OUT THE LAST OF THE NEWLY-LAID HALLWAY

differently now? Do you think your abilities have changed over the years – or maybe your sensibilities?

WP: "Everything was perfect for the time it was done in, and every story arc in *Elfquest* reflects a different phase and mind – the first issues of *Elfquest* reflected the '70s; the pages were crammed with panels and big fat lettering. By the time we got to the late '80s and early '90s we were doing *Kings Of The Broken Wheel* which was totally anime influenced. So every phase and every story arc reflects my development.

"But this is our finest hour, right now. I became a completely digital artist in 2003. I started working on a tablet and I'm creating my best work as a result of going digital. Many comics companies were observing how much quicker deadlines got met as a result of digital! So it became a fact that if an artist or colourist wasn't digital savvy they weren't getting as much work. The old-fashioned ways, as lovely as they were, went into the background. And the work right now reflects my animation roots. I started out as a huge fan of animation with Disney, and I discovered anime when I was 10 years old. So there's always been an anime following to my comics work, and when you work digitally you can create an animation cel effect with beautiful, rich backgrounds and then the characters moving on top of that – it's a look I adore."

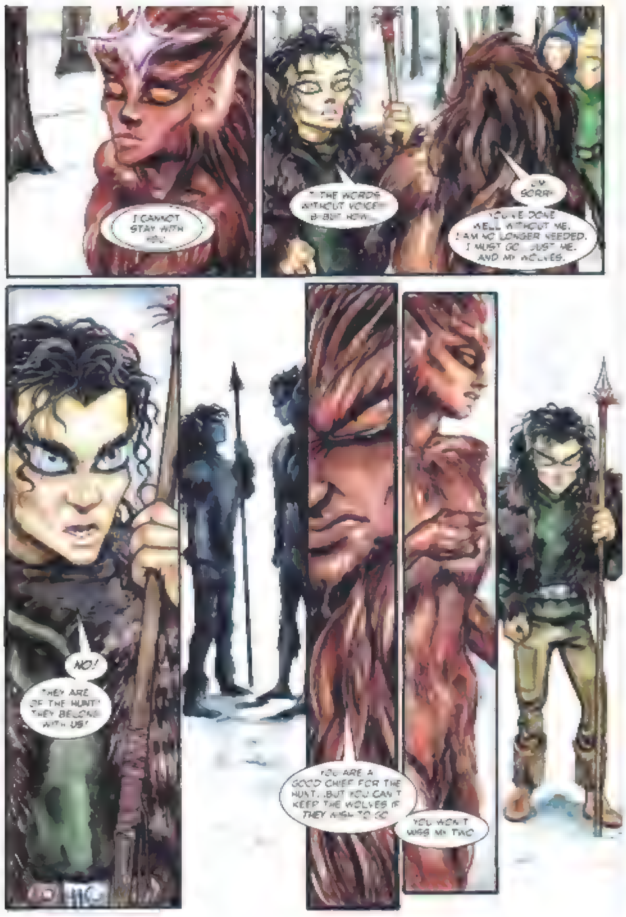
Above: *Elfquest: Shards* – and its predecessors *New Blood* and *Hidden Years* – took the story forward in time from the prehistoric to the medieval period; *Kings Cross* was a two-issue miniseries published at the end of 1997.

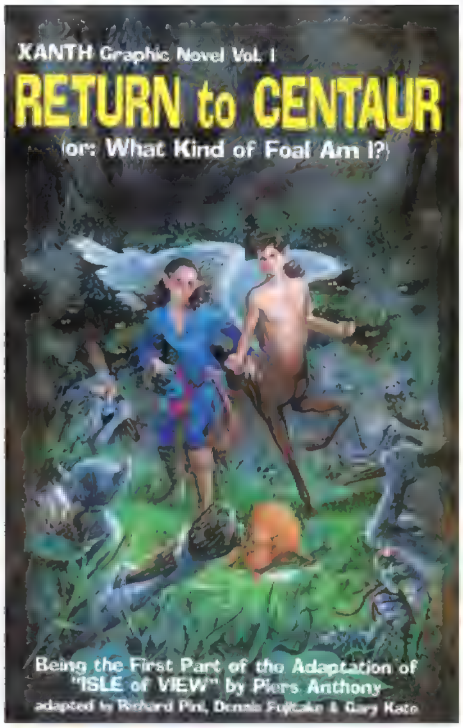
CH: It always seemed that you had an ending in mind. How important is the arc to understanding the success of *Elfquest*?

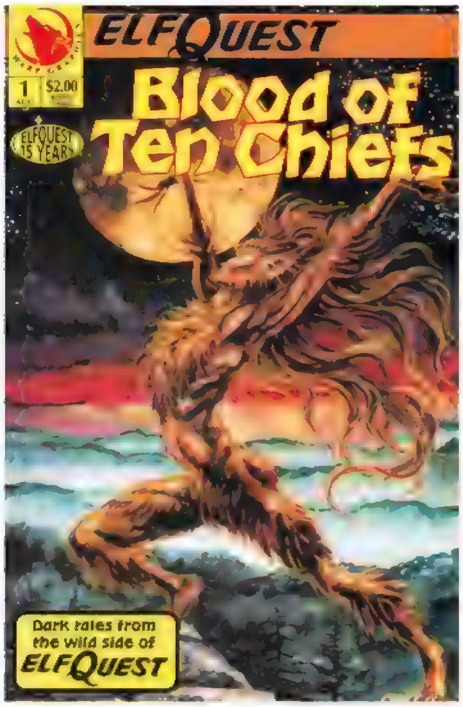
RP: "Absolutely true. Wendy sat me down and told me what I'll call the 'first chapter' which is actually made up of many individual issues. And we did that first chapter in the '70s and '80s and it came to a very satisfying conclusion. And then we went to the next chapter and then the next. What we're doing with Dark Horse is the *next*, we're titling it *Final Quest*. And what that means is not the end of *Elfquest* but it does mean the conclusion of this grand, over-arching story that we have known from the beginning."

WP: "I'll give you the key to it in one word – Cutter. This is his hero's journey. It took us 35 years to get there but he's gonna go through the cave and we're gonna see how he comes out with the elixir."

RP: "It's very Joseph Campbell, it's very true to the archetypes and the basic underlying structure of mythology. But we were very young and we didn't know what we were doing. It was all instinctual, and I think this


I CANNOT STAY WITH YOU.
...THE WORDS WITHOUT VOICE! B-BUT HOW...
I'M SORRY.
YOU'VE DONE WELL WITHOUT ME. I AM NO LONGER NEEDED. I MUST GO... JUST ME. AND MY WOLVES.
NO!
THEY ARE OF THE HUNT! THEY BELONG WITH US!
YOU ARE A GOOD CHIEF FOR THE HUNT... BUT YOU CAN'T KEEP THE WOLVES IF THEY WISH TO GO.
YOU WON'T MISS MY TWO.

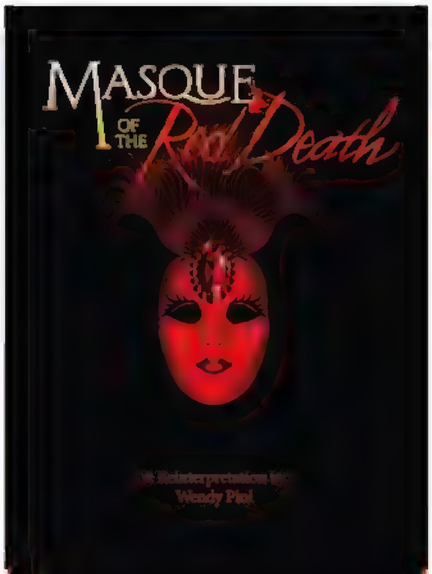

XANTH Graphic Novel Vol. I
RETURN to CENTAUR
(or: What Kind of Foal Am I?)
Being the First Part of the Adaptation of "ISLE of VIEW" by Piers Anthony
adapted by Richard Pini, Dennis Fujitake & Gary Kato

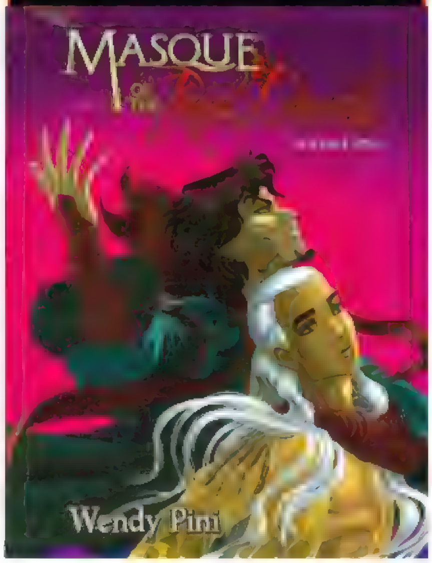

ELFQUEST
1
$2.00
ELFQUEST 15 YEARS
Blood of Ten Chiefs
Dark tales from the wild side of ELFQUEST

BEHIND THE MASQUE

Elfquest **isn't Wendy Pini's only claim to fame. She started out contributing covers to *Galaxy Science Fiction* and *Galileo* magazines in the '70s, establishing herself as a sci-fi artist. She has also illustrated stories for Marvel and DC, as well as creating a graphic novel based on the *Beauty And The Beast* TV show. Then, starting in 2008, she took the Edgar Allan Poe story "Masque Of The Red Death" and created an edgy, futuristic graphic novel.**

"When Warner Bros optioned *Elfquest* in 2008, part of the contract was we couldn't do anything with it as they were sitting on the rights," she reveals. "So I had this wonderful four-year block of space where I could get *Masque* out of my system. Not many people know this but I'm actually a horror artist and an erotic artist, but I don't get much chance to express those aspects of my life. With *Elfquest* there's a certain line that we won't cross, so *Masque* enabled me to do everything I couldn't in *Elfquest* and express that side of my creativity!"


MASQUE OF THE Red Death
A Reinterpretation by Wendy Pini


MASQUE OF THE Red Death
Wendy Pini

is the magic of archetypes. You don't really have to know what you're doing consciously, but the story will move according to the archetypes."

CH: So if someone has never read *Elfquest*, but would like to, do they have to go back to the beginning and read the first one?

RP: "It's really better if they do, and I realise that by saying that I'm making it more difficult for them, because that's 35 years worth of material. However, we have a digital archive and I uploaded almost 7,000 pages, everything we've ever done, to www.elfquest.com. You can read the whole thing for free! It's always been much more important to me that somebody be able to read the thing, than to be able to command a high price for a back issue. I want the story accessible, I don't care. I saw that Marvel was starting to put stuff online for 99c. I thought to hell with Marvel and DC, we're okay, we're in a good place financially and this is our gift to existing readers who may have missed a few issues, or to new readers who would never be able to discover it and go along with it if this weren't here." CH

> **"You can read it all for free! It's our gift to our readers"**

Elfquest Special*: *The Final Quest *one-shot is available now from Dark Horse http://bit.ly/CHFinalQuest.*

Above: *Return To Centaur* is the first volume of a graphic novel adaptation of Piers Anthony's *Isle Of View*, featuring Wolfrider Jenny Elf; Later books, including, *Blood Of Ten Chiefs*, expanded on the history of the Wolfriders.

JUDGE JAMES'S COMICS COURTROOM

CRIMINALLY CRAFTY COMICS
BLOOF
My Brother's A Chimp

Trouble by Mark Millar: Aunt May and Uncle Ben as randy teenagers? The mind boggles. His Honour **Judge James Lovegrove** presides...

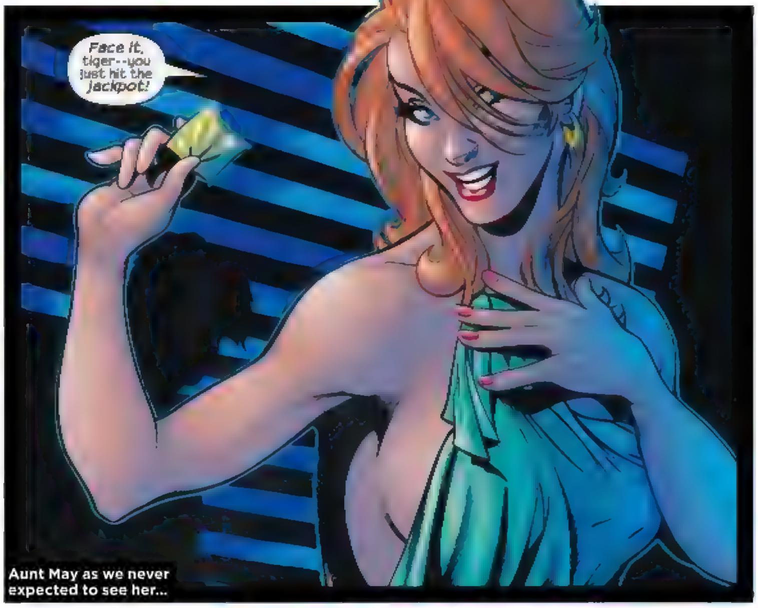
PROSECUTION: **"Mark Millar's *Trouble*. It sounds more like a statement of fact rather than the title of a comic. The Scottish writer is notorious for courting controversy. This is the man who gave us the Christian-baiting *Saviour* and *Chosen*, the ultraviolent *Kick-Ass*, and Captain America in *The Ultimates* pointing to the A on his forehead and asking, 'Surrender??!! You think this letter on my head stands for France?' And that's not forgetting the recent online storm that arose from his comments discussing rape as a plot device and saying it's equivalent to, no worse than, a decapitation. In short, Mark Millar and trouble are no strangers. He is often in it and seems to relish causing it."**

DEFENCE: "But we are not trying Mr Millar himself here today, are we? We are trying a miniseries he wrote that was published under Marvel's Epic imprint back in 2003. My learned friend is attempting to prejudice proceedings by impugning a creator's reputation. We must focus solely on the book itself, which is, in my view, a very respectable attempt to reinvent the romance comic and update it for the noughties. Romance comics, m'lud will surely remember, were once hugely popular and profitable. Joe Simon and Jack Kirby did arguably some of their finest work on romance strips, and many great artists cut their teeth in the genre, among them Frank Frazetta, John Romita Sr and Wally Wood."

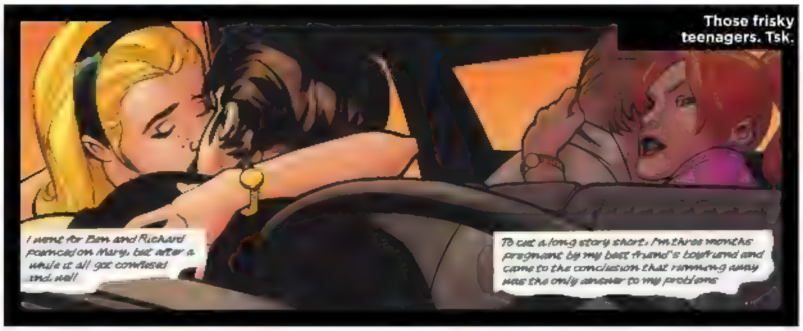
PROSECUTION: **"But the genre's post-war heyday was long gone by the time *Trouble* appeared. Not only that but romance comics were, as a rule, staid and innocent, confining their depictions of love to chaste embraces and kisses. Millar's idea of a romance comic includes copious amounts of sex, numerous masturbation references, and an unwanted teen pregnancy."**

DEFENCE: "So *Trouble* is about horny youngsters doing what horny youngsters do. What is the problem with that? It's frank and honest, unlike the traditional romance comic which was distinctly prudish and old-fashioned. Back in those days, the subject of sex dared not rear its head. Any female character seen to be flirty or a man-chaser was obliged to receive some kind of comeuppance. The gender politics of the age meant that no woman could be shown having a successful career and a successful love life; she had to choose between one or the other. I suspect that what my learned friend dislikes most about *Trouble* is that it is a modern romance comic. It may be set in the '70s but it doesn't wallow in nostalgia – its tone and execution are bang up to date."

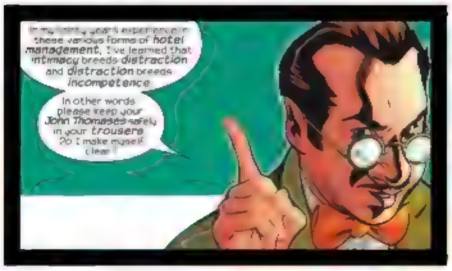
PROSECUTION: **"No, what is offensive about *Trouble* is that it stars Spider-Man's very own Aunt May and Uncle Ben. It shows them as young people spending their summer vacation working at a resort in East Hampton accompanied by, in Ben's case, his brother Richie and, in May's case, her best friend Mary. Both girls have the intention of losing their virginity as well as making a bit of spare cash. Aunt May and Uncle Ben are cherished members of the *Spider-Man* supporting cast. Aunt May is the sweet-natured, perpetually worried surrogate parent of her nephew Peter Parker. Uncle Ben is the man whose tragic, brutal death inspires a callow youth with spider powers to grow up and accept his responsibilities. Comics readers are desperately fond of these two, and Millar tramples all over that affection by showing them bed-hopping promiscuously and by portraying May as – pardon the crudity, Your Honour – a bit of a slut. The final panel of the first issue sums up his approach. It shows a naked May, her breasts barely covered, holding up a sealed condom packet and saying, 'Face it, tiger – you just hit the jackpot.'"**

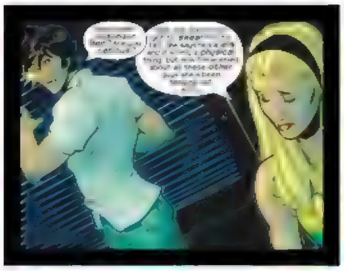

Face it, tiger--you just hit the jackpot!

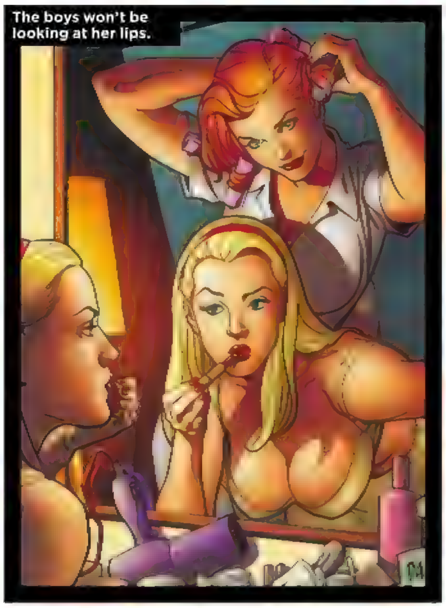
Aunt May as we never expected to see her...


I went for Ben and Richard Parker/Mary, but after a while it all got confused and, well
To cut a long story short, I'm three months pregnant by my best friend's boyfriend and came to the conclusion that running away was the only answer to my problems

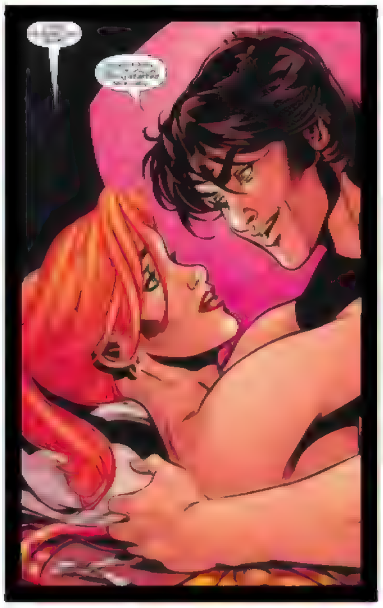
Those frisky teenagers. Tsk.

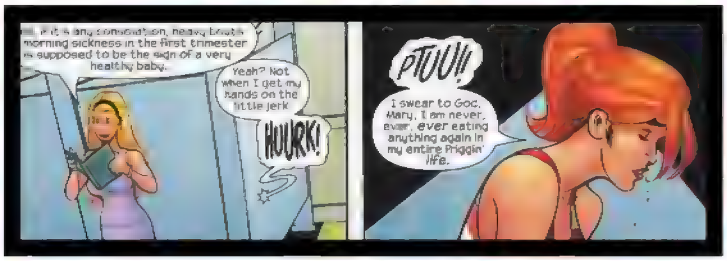

these various forms of hotel management, I've learned that intimacy breeds distraction and distraction breeds incompetence
In other words please keep your John Thomases safely in your trousers. Do I make myself clear

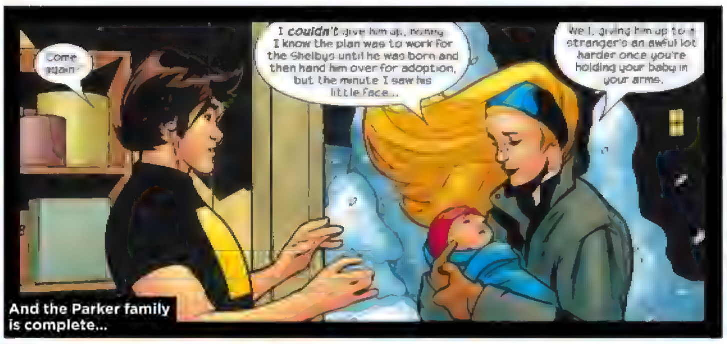




The boys won't be looking at her lips.




morning sickness in the first trimester is supposed to be the sign of a very healthy baby.
Yeah? Not when I get my hands on the little jerk
HUURK!
PTUU!!
I swear to God, Mary, I am never, ever, ever eating anything again in my entire friggin' life.


Come again
I couldn't give him up, honey. I know the plan was to work for the Shelbys until he was born and then hand him over for adoption, but the minute I saw his little face...
Well, giving him up to a stranger's an awful lot harder once you're holding your baby in your arms.

And the Parker family is complete...

> **“ Millar's idea of a romance comic includes copious amounts of sex and an unwanted teen pregnancy ”**

DEFENCE: "Surely that's just a warm, knowing tribute to the classic Mary Jane Watson line. It's hard to see what people find so objectionable about this depiction of a lusty, vivacious May before she became, quote unquote, Aunt May. Every old woman was a young woman once, with a young woman's desires and appetites. In that respect, *Trouble* makes one look at Aunt May afresh. It adds an extra dimension to a character who, let's face it, for years was nothing more than a frail, fretful biddy."

PROSECUTION: "*Trouble* concludes with May falling pregnant, not to Ben, who eventually becomes her husband, but to his brother. Mary adopts the baby and marries Richie Parker, and together they raise the child, Peter, as their own. The idea is that May is in fact Peter's true mother and has known this all along yet never revealed it to anyone, not even her husband. Some retrospective continuity implants are bearable, some even enhance the overall mythology, but some are just plain wrong, and this is one of those. Interestingly, the revelations in *Trouble* have not become canon. They have, in fact, never been mentioned again. I think that speaks volumes."

DEFENCE: "Careful study of the evidence will explain why. In the closing pages of the final issue, at Mary's wedding to Richie, the bridegroom is introduced by a friend to 'my dad's old army pal' – someone by the name of Bucky Barnes. This was before the 'Winter Soldier' storyline in *Captain America* where Bucky is shown to have survived his apparent death during World War II to become a brainwashed Soviet assassin. In other words, Millar is slyly hinting that *Trouble* takes place in an alternate timeline, a different Marvel universe."

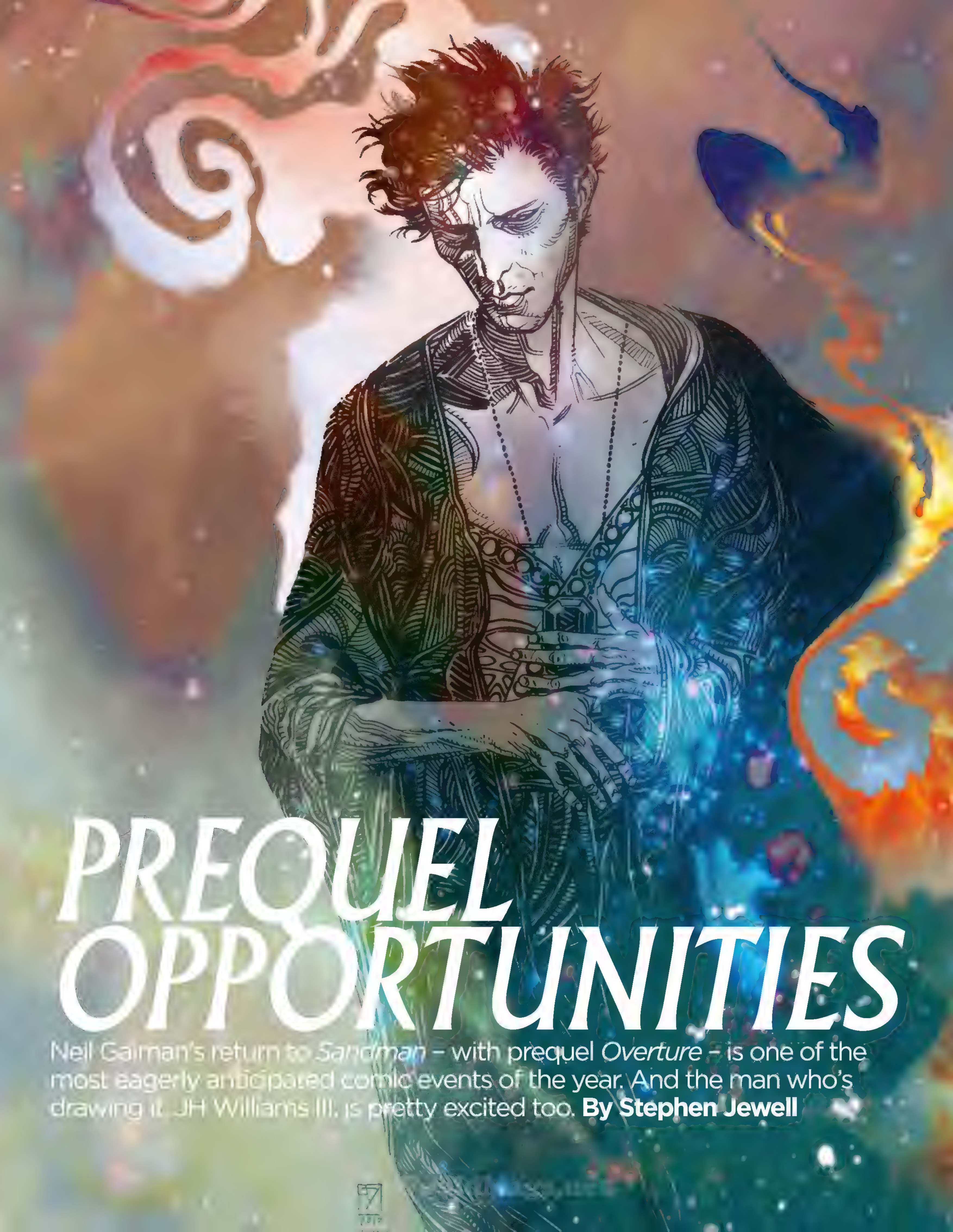
PROSECUTION: "Which begs the question, why should it then feature May and Ben at all? Could the story's central quartet have not been just any four teenagers? Why did Millar choose characters we already know and are emotionally invested in?"

DEFENCE: "Millar is not solely to blame. The book was originally conceived by Marvel's then vice-president Bill Jemas and editor-in-chief Joe Quesada. Clearly they felt it would be easier to promote and sell if it appeared to tie in to existing continuity."

PROSECUTION: "I will say this for *Trouble*. Artists Terry and Rachel Dodson certainly know how to draw beautiful-looking people. If we must have bedroom romps in a comic, it helps if it's aesthetically pleasing."

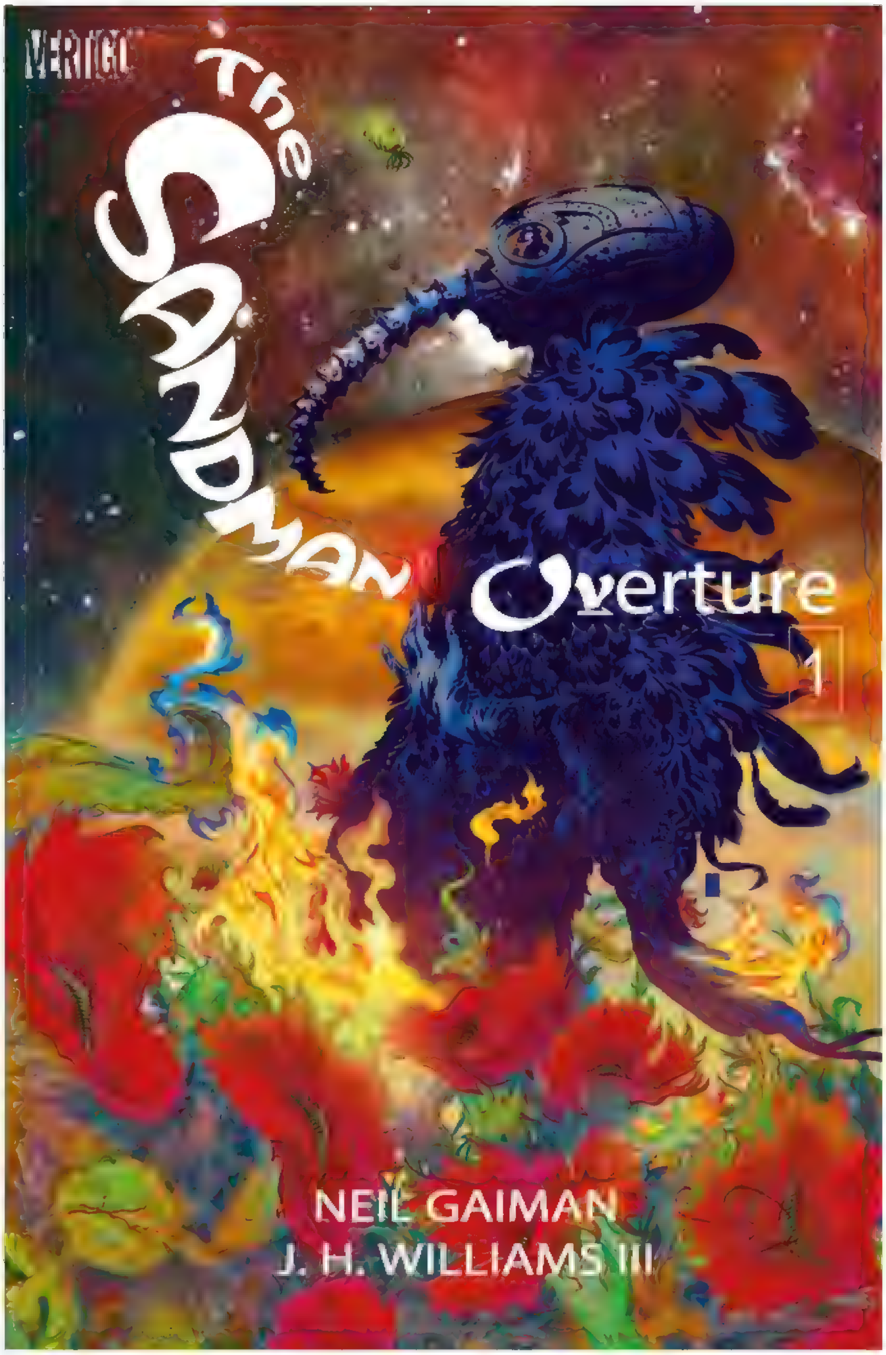
DEFENCE: "At least on that we can all agree." CH

IN THE DOCK NEXT TIME:
DC Challenge. *A 12-issue maxiseries in which different sets of creators play pass-the-parcel with the plot. What could possibly go wrong?*

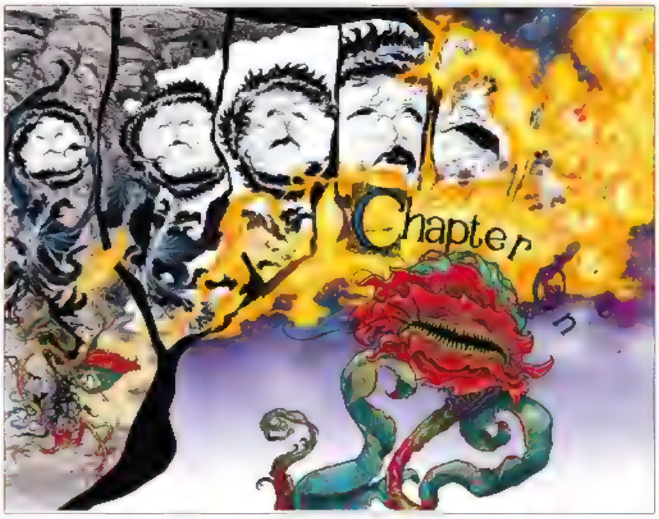


PREQUEL OPPORTUNITIES

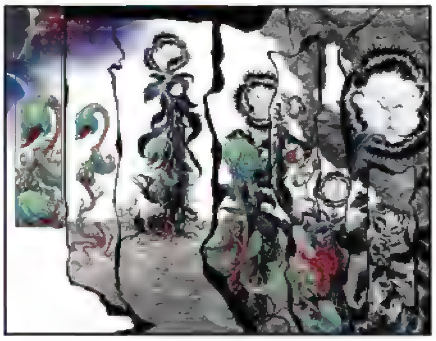
Neil Gaiman's return to *Sandman* – with prequel *Overture* – is one of the most eagerly anticipated comic events of the year. And the man who's drawing it, JH Williams III, is pretty excited too. **By Stephen Jewell**



All images © DC Comics



Left: JH Williams's beautiful art for *The Sandman: Overture* #1. The book will be published bi-monthly over the course of 2013-2014.



From Milo Manara to Dave McKean, many top artists have graced the pages of *Sandman* over the past few decades. However, none has possessed the inspired flare for dynamic layouts and visual experimentation as James "JH" Williams III. From the freewheeling alchemical approach of Alan Moore's *Promethea* to the more contained work on his recent *Batwoman* run, the San Francisco-based illustrator has established a formidable reputation as one of the medium's most innovative visionaries.

Now he is taking on his most high-profile assignment to date, teaming up with Neil Gaiman on the bestselling author's long-awaited return to the acclaimed Vertigo title that made his name in the early-'90s.

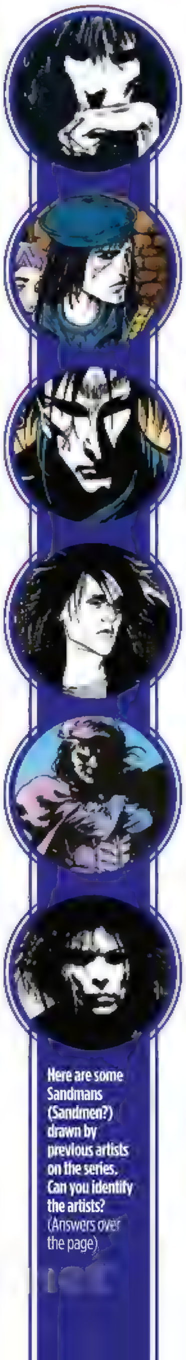
Released this month to coincide with the DC cutting-edge imprint's 20th anniversary, the six-part *The Sandman: Overture* is set to become the year's hottest release. And in a fitting tribute to the much-loved series's beguiling sense of kismet, Williams reveals that his involvement came about thanks to a chance encounter a few years ago, with Neil himself at San Diego Comic Con.

"My wife Wendy and I were walking out of our hotel, and I happened to notice Neil," he recalls. "He was either about to get into or had gotten out of a cab. I said to Wendy, 'There's Neil Gaiman!' Having never met Neil before, and being a big admirer of his writing, I wondered aloud if we should go over and just say hello, which would be the typical fan thing to do. Then I thought, no, that would be incredibly rude as he's already in the middle of a conversation with a couple of people."

However, Williams realised that he might never again have such a golden opportunity to introduce himself to his hero. "We kept walking, for about another 20 to 30 feet, then I stopped abruptly, saying, 'No, I have to at least meet him – shake his hand'. So we quickly turned around, went up to him, and rudely inserted ourselves into the group. I introduced myself, saying something stupidly fanboyish, I'm certain, that I was the artist on *Promethea*, and if he ever wished to work on something with me, I'd love to draw a story of his – anything he wanted."

But it was Williams's relationship with former Vertigo executive editor Karen Berger that eventually proved crucial. "Cut to many years later. I'd become friends with Karen, who had been wanting to find something to work with me on for quite a while," he says. "But the right thing never seemed to show up, or our schedules never quite worked."

Then last year, the West Coast-based artist received a game-changing early-morning email from DC's New York offices. "It was from Karen, who was talking about the new *Sandman* project that they were doing with Neil and how I was at the top of the list for this, and that this was finally the absolute right project for me to do for Vertigo," he adds. "Before calling Karen, I awoke rapidly from the sudden adrenaline of excitement, rushed into the other room to boisterously tell Wendy what I'd just read. And, of course, the answer would have to be, 'Yes! Yes! Yes!' There could be no other choice really. The first time I spoke to Neil after this, he fondly mentioned that long-ago introduction I'd made toward him, that he'd never forgotten how much it clearly meant to me to draw a story for him. And he graciously still says that today; that it hadn't been rude of me at all. And you know what they say about first impressions!"



Here are some Sandmans (Sandmen?) drawn by previous artists on the series. Can you identify the artists? (Answers over the page)

TOP-NOTCH TEAM-UPS

One of the few artists to have worked not only with Neil's old friend Alan Moore but also with Grant Morrison (*Seven Soldiers*) and Warren Ellis (*Desolation Jones*), Williams has now added Gaiman to that exclusive list. "It's surprisingly quite different," he says of Gaiman's scripting style, compared to his fellow leading British scribes. "It's not overly detailed but it definitely feels like it's written by a prose writer. There's a certain soft artfulness to it."

Sandman's success was slow to start with. It was first published in 1989 as one of

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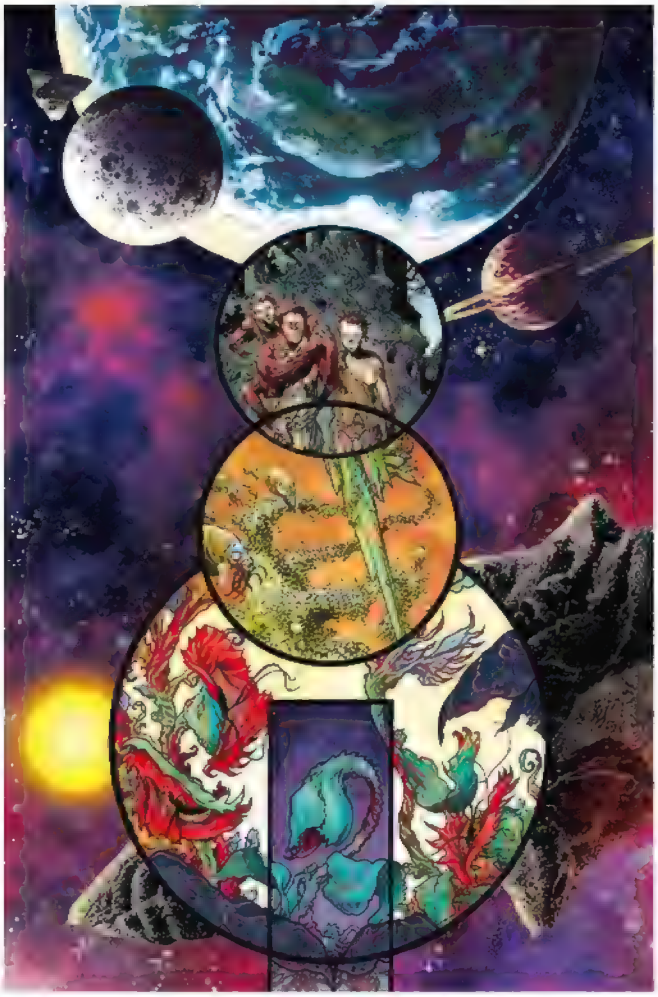


DC's then-burgeoning mature readers' books, four years before Vertigo was formally established. Eventually its cult following mushroomed into huge mainstream success. The collected edition became one of the few graphic novels to make the *New York Times* bestseller list, while its intriguing, heartfelt storylines garnered an unusually strong female following.

"It's smart, poignantly thoughtful, and it challenges without ever being inaccessible," says Williams of its widespread popularity. "It moves in intriguing ways, sometimes quite unexpectedly, and it feels like something that all of the creators involved found joy in. It has a certain kind of magic that goes well beyond the sum of its parts."

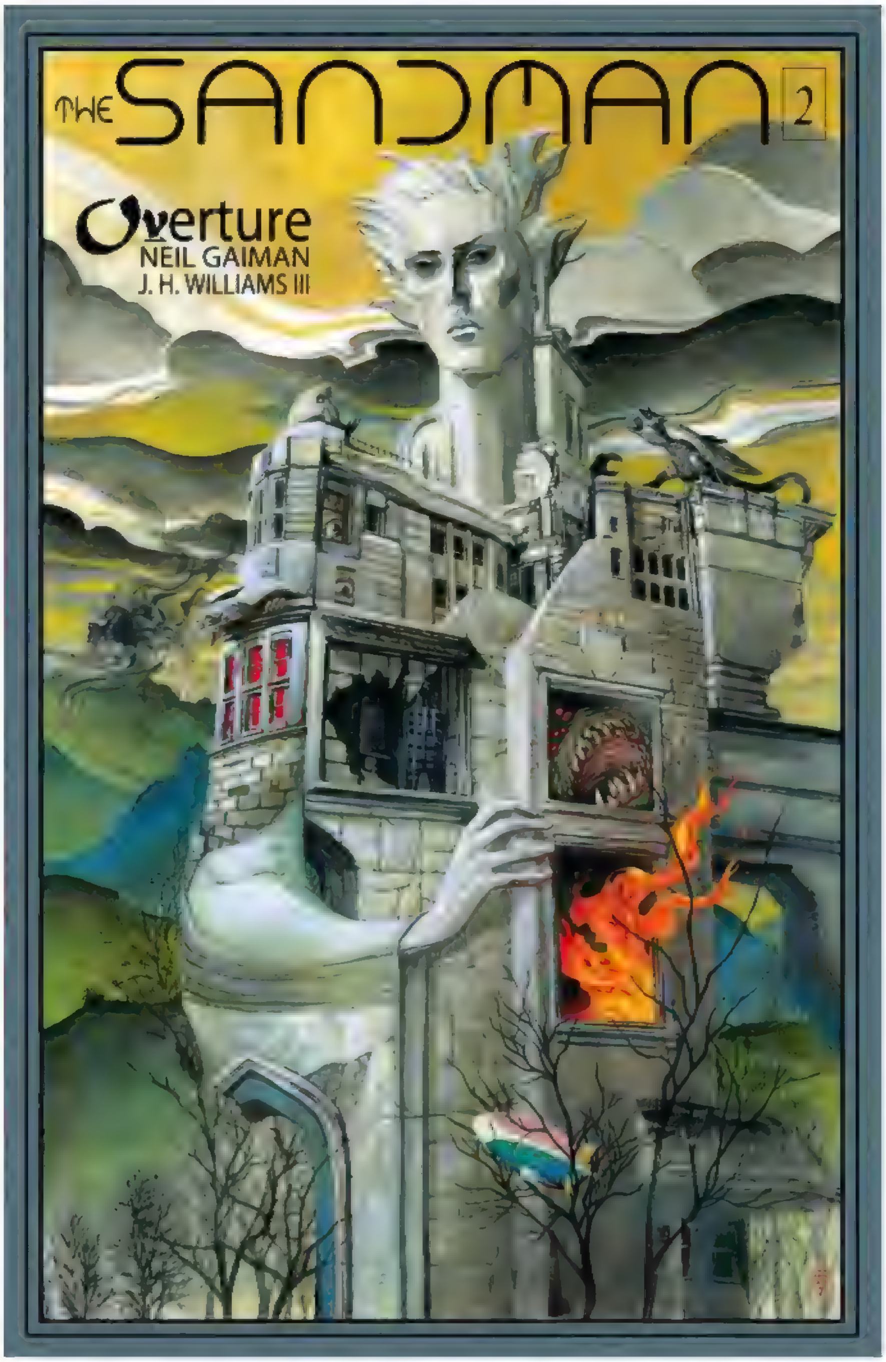
JEWEL THIEF

The comic book began life as a reboot of obscure DC superhero Sandman – whose incarnations include *Infinity, Inc*'s Hector Hall and more recently pulp detective Wesley Dodds, who featured in long-running Vertigo series *Sandman Mystery Theatre* – but Gaiman's more mythic interpretation quickly grew into something so much bigger.

Spotlighting Morpheus, the enigmatic Lord of the Dreaming, the opening seven-part arc "More Than Rubies" – which comprises the bulk of inaugural Sandman graphic novel *Preludes & Nocturnes* – begins with Dream escaping from his decades-long imprisonment in an enchanted bottle at the hands of British occultist Roderick Burgess.

Reportedly set in 1916, *The Sandman: Overture* reveals exactly how the weakened Dream King fell into the clutches of the nefarious magus.

Right: Cover art for *The Sandman: Overture* #2. It's easy to see why JH Williams has won both Eisner and Harvey awards.



"Is it really set then? Are we certain of that? Time is a funny thing!" teases Williams, who concedes that authentically capturing such a bygone era is one of the least favoured aspects of his work.

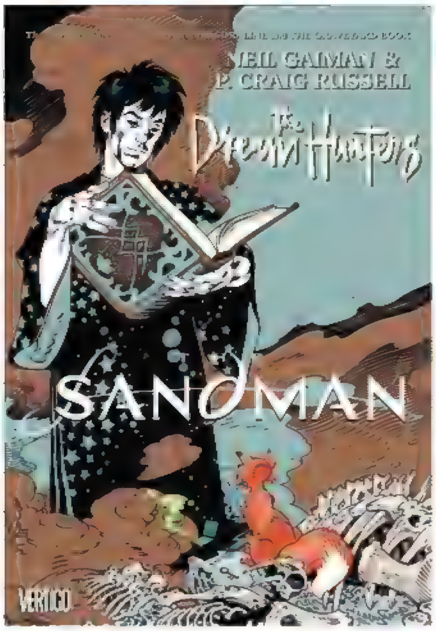
"Historical stuff stresses me out, because I always find that proper details can easily get deluded or slightly inaccurate," he adds. "But the end result is always at least making sure that it feels authentic enough."

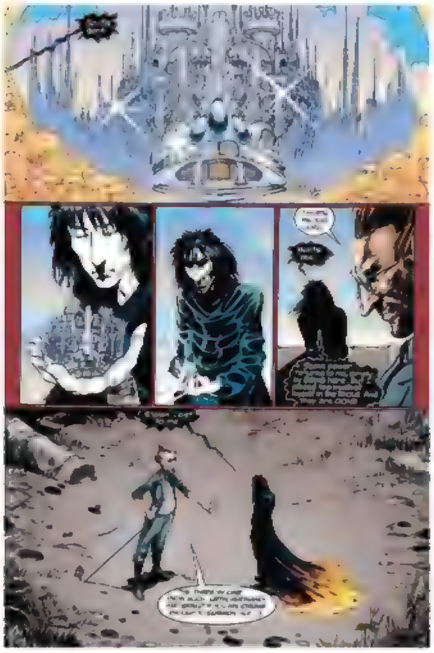
"More Than Rubies" boasted art from Sam Kieth, Mike Dringenberg and the late Malcolm Jones III, and an eclectic array of artists would go on to contribute to *Sandman*'s increasingly vast canvas over the course of its 75-issue run, which concluded in 1996. Encompassing everything from Charles Vess's classic Arthur Rackham-inspired illustrations to Marc Hempel's streamlined cartooning and Kelley Jones's gritty linework, Williams has studied all his predecessor's sterling efforts.

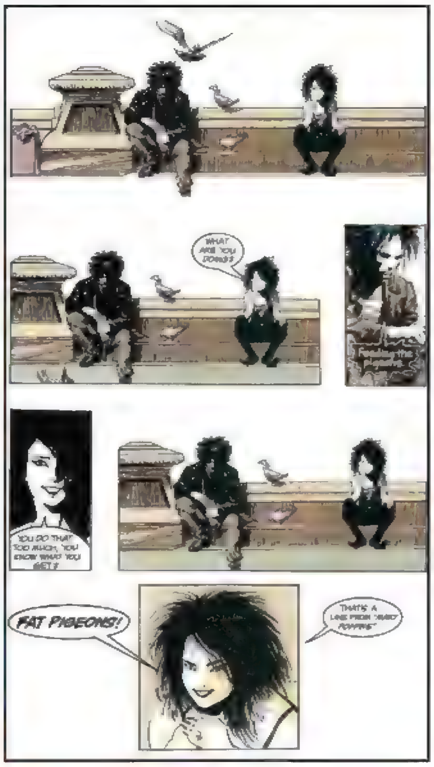
"I felt it's very important to reread all of the original material, to live in the Sandman Dreamscape," he explains. "Especially because there are things being inferred in the prequel story that relate to what is to come. So I'm finding it a very interesting challenge to live in Sandman's past, as it were, but yet it is still very much in the here and now. It has to feel as if now is the time to tell this story, and that it's not just some nostalgic head-trip."

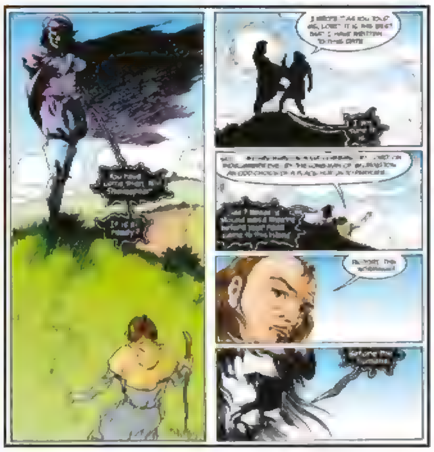
However, he is determined to stamp his own mark on the book. "It was inspiring to see and remind myself of what the previous artists had done, but then I had to divorce myself from that," he adds. "Otherwise anything I did would be relying too much on past expectations. So the visuals have to feel like the Sandman of the past but then also feel like now. It's as if the Sandman mythos is an ever-expanding bubble and I'm having

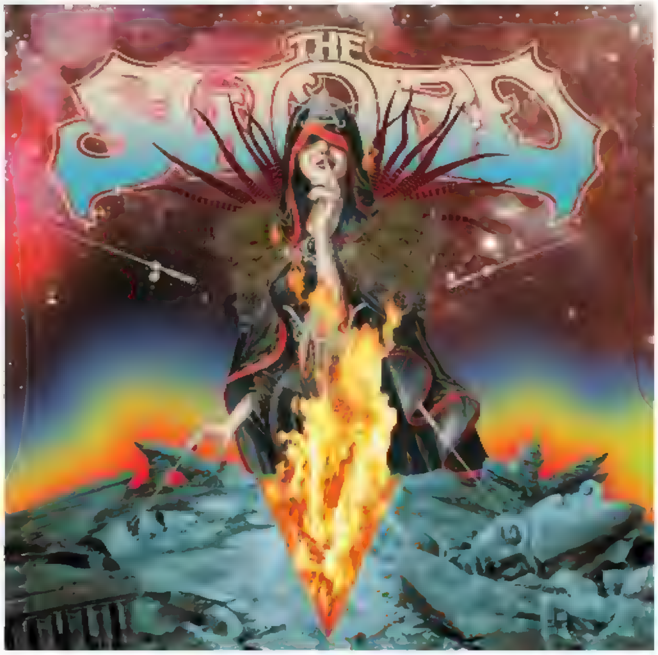
> **“It's an interesting challenge to live in Sandman's past”**

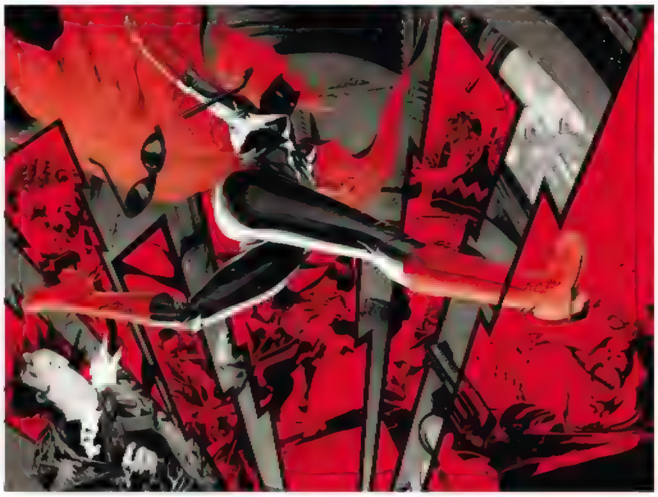





WHAT ARE YOU DOING?
Feeding the pigeons
YOU DO THAT TOO MUCH, YOU KNOW WHAT YOU GET?
FAT PIGEONS!
THAT'S A LINE FROM 'MARY POPPINS'







to drive myself along its inner circumference looking ahead, but if I look up I know already where I've been, while seeing where I'm about to go. It feels like a metaphoric time-loop in play, appropriately so when you get to read *Overture*."

DREAM WEAVER

Gaiman has revealed that *Overture* is closest in spirit to the Miguelanxo Prado-drawn sequence from 2003's *Endless Nights* graphic novel, which was set at the dawn of time and took in numerous "weird crossovers with the DC Universe".

Crucially, Williams has also been allowed the freedom to tell the story in his own distinctive way. "[Gaiman] is trusting me to do what I do," Williams says. "So I'm looking for ways to bring challenging visuals – hopefully in ways that people might expect from me while not expecting the final result. I'm looking for ways to push myself."

With the possible exception of Destruction, the other five archetypal members of Dream's dysfunctional cosmic family The Endless – Death, Destiny, Desire, Despair and Delirium – are all poised to make cameo appearances in *Overture*. "I'm eager to draw any of them," says Williams. "And as far as my interpretations go, it really depends on the story. Some characters appear in unusual ways but that's not really surprising, as Sandman stories have always done that. I did request to draw Merv the Pumpkinhead though!"

Williams launched his career co-creating DC superhero spy series *Chase* alongside Dan Curtis Johnson, but he's added writing to his bow over the past two years, pencilling and co-scripting *Batwoman* with W Haden Blackman.

"It was an odd feeling," he says of returning solely to art duties. "But with every script I've always tried to find the little things to make the story my own as much as it is the writer's. So when I was drawing *Batwoman*, I almost looked at it as if it was written by someone else. I've tried to be objective, and the most difficult thing is really in the scripting style, as Neil's style is quite different to my own. I had to re-adjust myself, and how I perceive what is written, and what the script is getting at."

He has purposely not varied his artistic approach between the two books. "It's a bit like apples and oranges," he reasons. "Both *Batwoman* and *Sandman* have very different properties that are distinctly their own. If there are any similarities, it would have to be in how I visually present the drama. I do like to have some intensity to the drama, a kind of weighty feel."

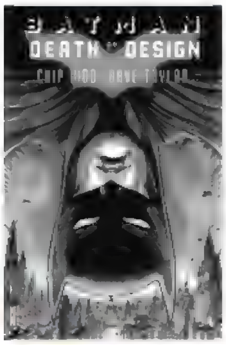
Above: Williams and Haden Blackman's beautifully illustrated *Batwoman* was the jewel in the New 52's crown.
Above left: As well as the 75 *Sandman* comic books, Gaiman also wrote a standalone novella, "The Dream Hunters".

Williams and Blackman recently announced that they were both leaving *Batwoman* after #24, citing constant editorial interference, but Williams mostly enjoyed working on the Bat title. "It depends on which day," he laughs. "Seriously though, I relish being able to write and I only wish I had much more time to do it."

As well as his comic book work, Williams has supplied cover art for several albums including heavy metallers The Sword's 2012 opus *Apocryphon* and Blondie's upcoming tenth album *Ghosts Of Download*. But despite *Overture*'s operatic title, he insists there is no connection. "I don't think these sorts of things can be related to the *Sandman* visuals in any way, but they do still feel like me, I guess. I also feel like every project I take on, even though some of my sensibilities will cross-pollinate, visually always ends up having its own distinct voice. I do my best to make sure each project feels like its own thing, but you can possibly see subtle connections that point to the work as being mine." **CH**

*You'll be able to get your hands on **The Sandman: Overture #1** on 30 October.*

ANSWERS
Sandman artists, from top to bottom: Michael Zulli; Marc Hempel; Jill Thompson; Charles Vess; Mike Dringenberg.



1 TAYLOR GALLERY

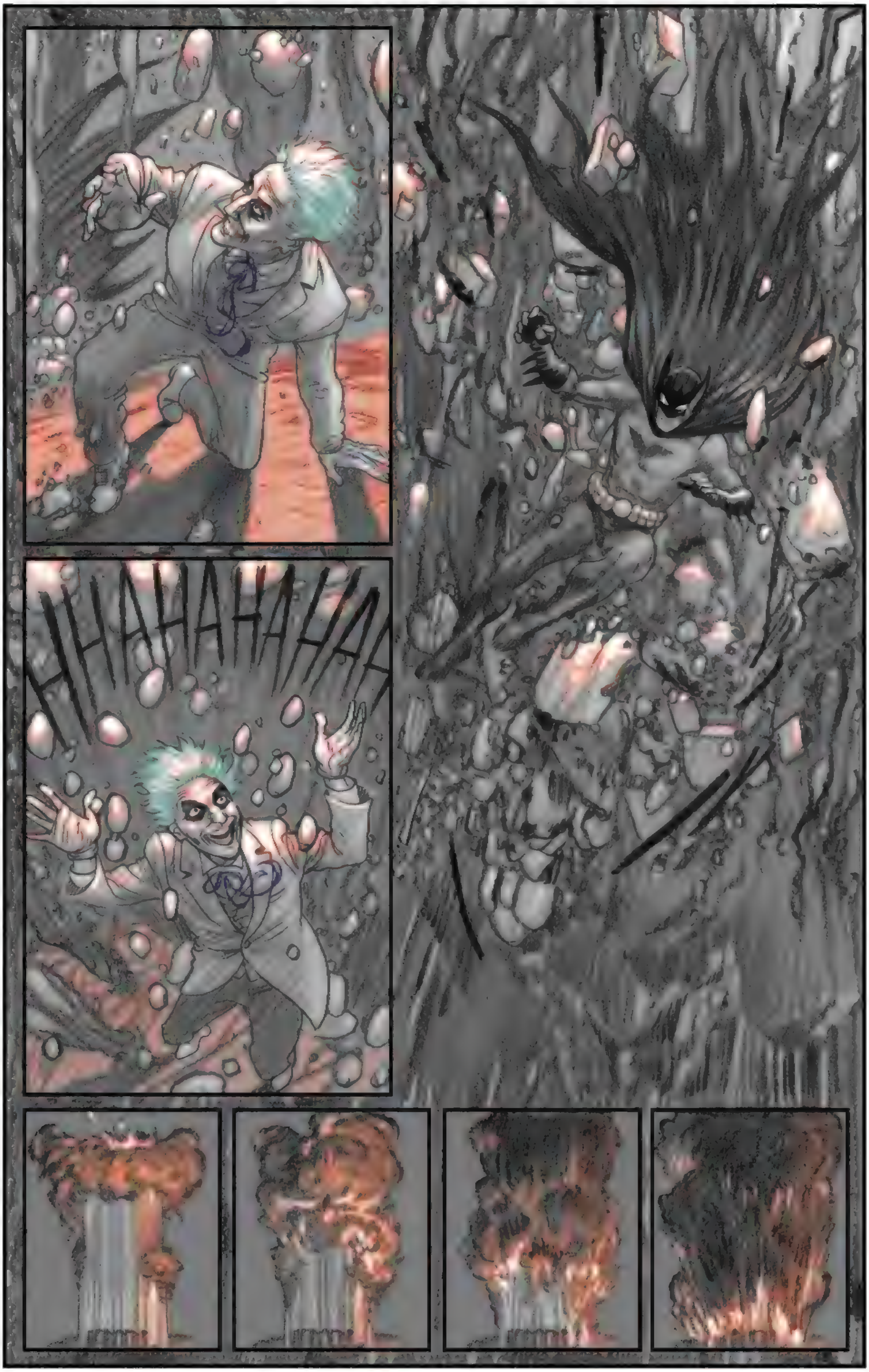
BATMAN: DEATH BY DESIGN

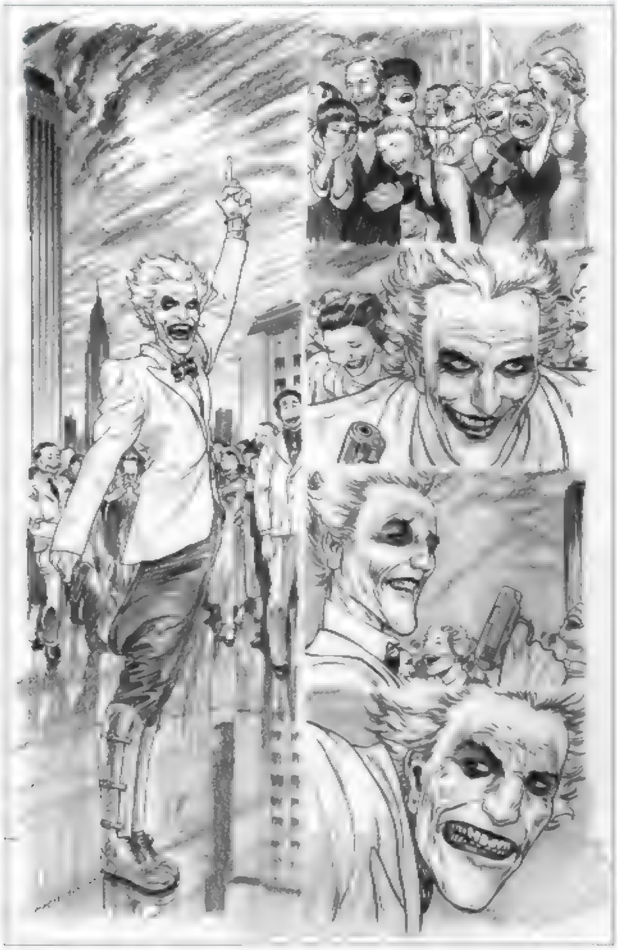
GRAPHIC NOVEL, DC COMICS

"In my opinion, this page from *Batman: Death By Design* is the best of them all. I've been delighted with the response the book has had; it's been heart-warming to read people's feelings about something I slaved over for so long. This page, I think, captures the mood perfectly – or at least as well as I can achieve!

"The method is quite simple… after I've produced a thumbnail breakdown I then draw it out in blue pencil, which is easy to drop out when I get to the Photoshop finishing and colouring stage. Once I'm happy with that I then 'ink' the page using regular graphite pencils, HB and 5B generally. Pencil is wonderful for capturing light and creating the right lighting.

"Though this method is technically demanding, it's very difficult to fix mistakes so you have to not make them; the result is very satisfying."





THE ART OF...

DAVE TAYLOR

He made his name drawing Batman books for DC and has also worked for *2000 AD* and Dark Horse. Joel Meadows meets the British artist with a distinctly European style...

ARTIST PROFILE

INFO
British comic illustrator heavily influenced by artists such as Moebius and Druillet

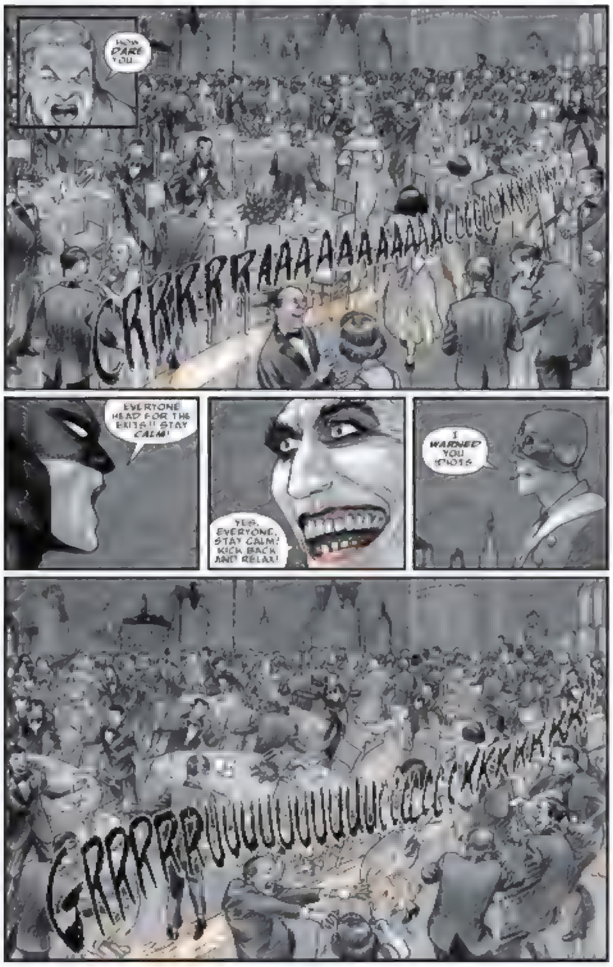
LOCATION
Liverpool

WEBSITE
http://d-taylor-comics-music-ford-mustangs.blogspot.co.uk

“Experience is the best teacher,” says Liverpudlian comic book artist Dave Taylor, who landed his first gig at Marvel UK in 1990 before heading stateside to work on Marvel's *Force Works* and various Batman titles for DC. He's certainly had a few experiences in a turbulent career interrupted by illness, and punctuated by a falling out with DC in 2000 (he was none too keen on its conveyor-belt philosophy, which saw him having to churn out eight to ten pages a week). After a brief semi-retirement from comics, he returned via *Judge Dredd*, and is now at a professional and creative high point: back working for DC on its Batman books, as well as other more esoteric projects. “I'm now the artist I'd intended to be,” he tells *Comic Heroes*.

Comic Heroes: In 2012, you returned to draw Batman again. How did it feel coming back to the character?
Dave Taylor: “Since I was very young, watching the '60s TV show and then discovering the comics, I've had a great affection for the Batman. He's by far my favourite mainstream comic book character. So naturally I'm always excited when I'm asked to contribute to his long history. I genuinely consider it to be an honour.”

CH: You collaborated with author and book cover artist Chip Kidd, and this was his first full comic project. How was it working with someone less familiar with comics than yourself?
DT: “On reading Chip's script it wasn't apparent that he was lacking in experience. It read as well – if not better – than many scripts I'd handled before. There were a few details that I had to question him about, little things that betrayed his vast knowledge, but these were minor and easily resolved. As a 'seasoned veteran' I think I helped in giving him an effective insight into the writer/artist relationship – little things along the way that I'd suggest that he might have been unaware of – but on the whole he very rarely seemed anything other than a fellow experienced creator.” »


HOW DARE YOU
CRRKKRRAAAAAAAAAAACCCCKKKK
EVERYONE HEAD FOR THE EXITS!! STAY CALM!
YES, EVERYONE, STAY CALM! KICK BACK AND RELAX!
I WARNED YOU IDIOTS
GRRRRRUUUUUUUUUUUCCCCKKKKK

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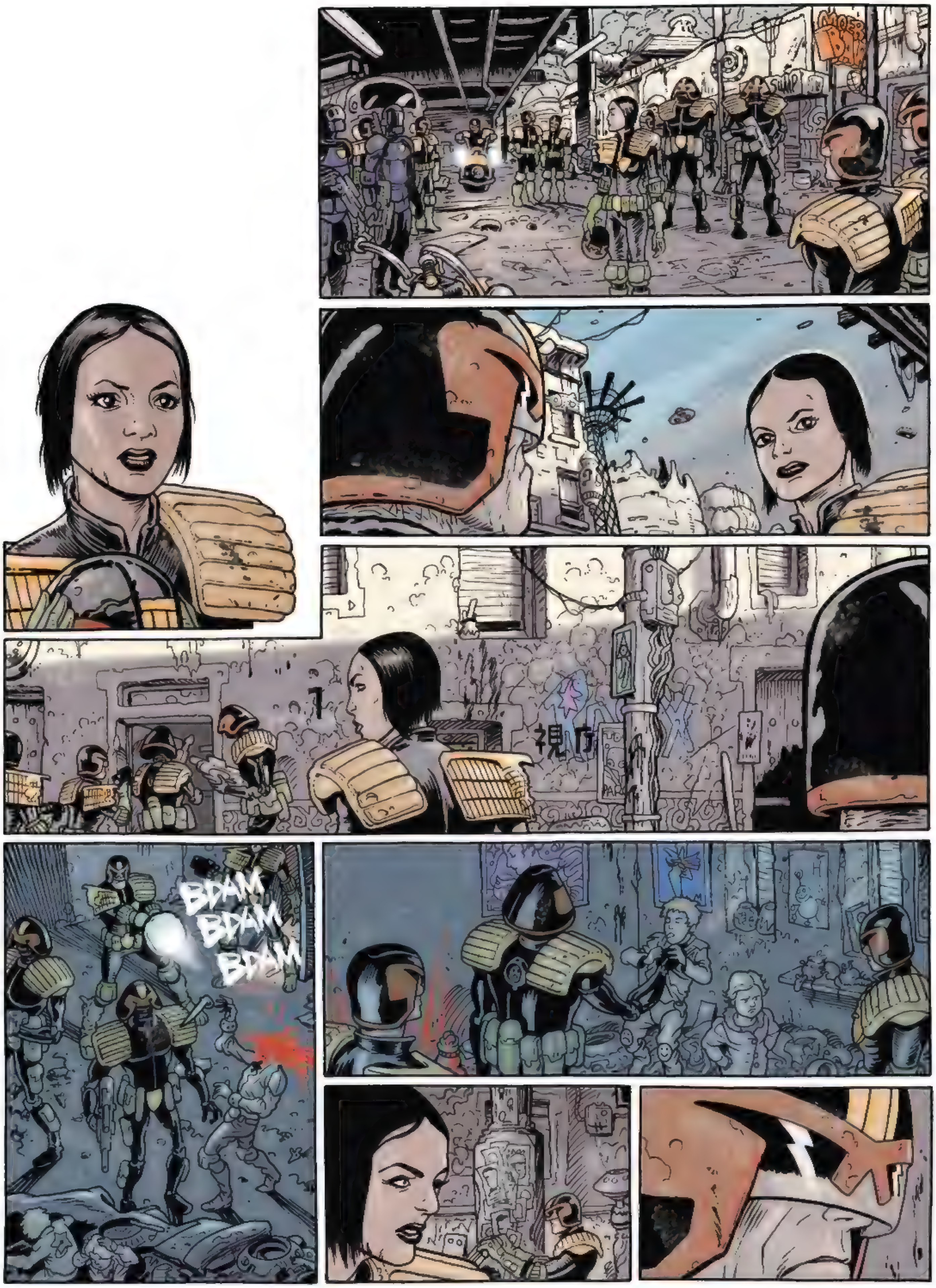
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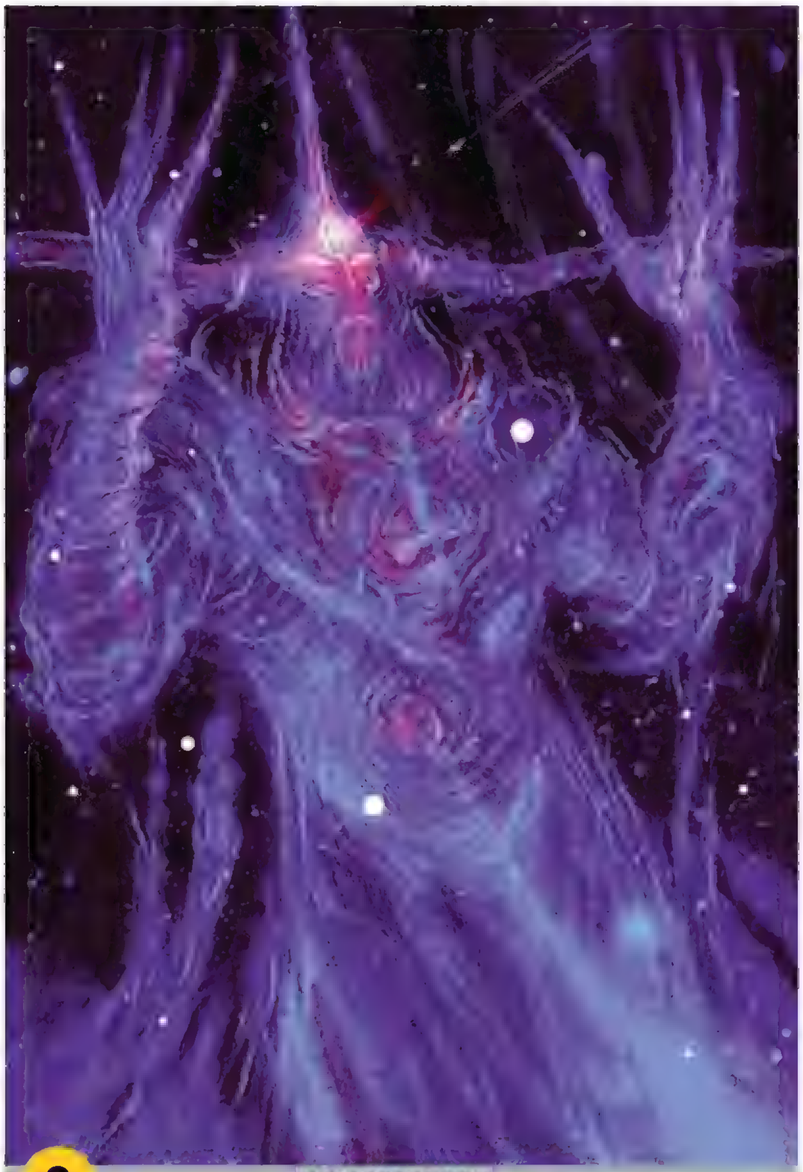
TAYLOR GALLERY

DREDD: WASTELANDS

WASTELANDS, JUDGE DREDD, 2000 AD

"This page, from John Wagner's *Dredd: Wastelands* story, is probably my favourite. After spending the last few years working purely in pencil on *Batman: Death By Design* I felt the need to ink this story as crisp and cleanly as I could, as a way of breaking myself out of that habit. It's a very different method and one I'd almost forgotten. Again, after roughing out the page as a thumbnail, I'd draw it out in blue pencil, being as clear with my descriptive lines as possible, throwing out any unnecessary lines, being quite ruthless.

"My inking on this, and I guess the whole layout of the page, is a reflection of my love of European comics, from Moebius to Hergé. And the colouring also is inspired by those comics. I try to use a naturalistic pallet, no primary colours, just reflected light. While I was ill I used the time wisely by studying the likes of Leonardo da Vinci, who wrote a tremendous amount about our concept of light and colour, how a person sees, and how to recreate that in your work."



3 TAYLOR GALLERY

PROPHET COVER

PROPHET #43, IMAGE COMICS

"By far my favourite line of work is sci-fi – it's what inspired me to become a comic book creator – so working on an issue of *Prophet* was a joy. This is the cover to my issue, created as a response to an earlier piece done for Nobrow Press for its *Gods And Monsters* book. It's drawn in graphite pencil on white paper then reversed in Photoshop. I then placed a colour layer over the image and fiddled about a little. A very fast method for something so cosmic! It's healthy to have a number of techniques up your sleeve; it helps you to stay interested."

CH: As well as working for the US publishers, you've also done an extensive amount of work for *2000 AD*. How different is it working for Rebellion compared with someone like DC?

DT: "There's very little difference between them from my point of view other than maybe a little less editorial involvement from Tharg. DC tends to be more inclined to suggest changes along the way, whereas Tharg hands me a script and expects me to interpret it relatively freely. Rebellion, well-named in this respect, has a more punk approach, or at least that's my interpretation. I think it's a reflection of the difference in scale between the two companies financially. DC, a satellite to a vast commercial enterprise, with powerful shareholders constantly expecting high returns, has more to lose and more to control."

CH: *Batman: Death By Design* was a full-length standalone book whereas the *Judge Dredd* work was small episodic stories. Which do you prefer? Or do you like the variety of moving from shorts to original graphic novels? What are the pros and cons of each?

DT: "Like most humans, I'm quite complex. I'm simultaneously capable of throwing myself at a large project in an utterly dedicated manner, burying myself in it completely, but at the same time I can get bored and my attention can drift. Knowing this, while I was working on *Batman: Death By Design*, I had to allow myself some side projects. I would give myself some time away from *Batman* to write my graphic novel, do designs and sketches for it, things like that. After a few days away I'd return with freshly charged batteries. It's very healthy to know your limitations and strengths."

CH: Your work is heavily influenced by European artists such as Moebius and Druillet. What is it about their work that really connects with you?

DT: "Moebius, Druillet and Bilal had a huge affect on me at a time when I was discovering my artistic ambitions. Science fiction was fascinating to me at the same time I was developing my love of drawing comics, so seeing these guys' work was a revelation. I realised that a freedom existed to produce anything one wished.

"I started working in comics professionally relatively late in life so I decided I needed to serve an apprenticeship, taking what work I could get from mainstream publishers. I felt, to keep getting work, that I needed to adopt a 'house style', all the time thinking that one day I could put what I'd been learning to good use in my own books.

"Frustratingly, life kept handing me demands... the need for food and shelter predominantly! Little by little, I was gaining confidence to branch out and do my own thing, going back to my love of European science fiction, but then, after an ugly battle with DC and an equally ugly divorce, I became ill and had to retire.

"I eventually returned to comics with a fresh outlook and a powerful desire to get my career right this time! I'm now the artist I'd intended to be all those years ago."

CH: You're also a big fan of classic *2000 AD* artists such as Brian Bolland and Mike McMahon. What is it that appeals to you about their work?

DT: "Cam Kennedy and Mike McMahon were my first encounters with the artistic and stylistic freedom that I later discovered with the likes of Moebius, Druillet and Bilal. At 14 they blew my little mind! They greatly helped to expand my fledgling imagination and ambition. Bolland, on the other hand, gave me a respect for clarity and finesse, a master of drawing and inking. That's why, out of all of these great artists, Jean

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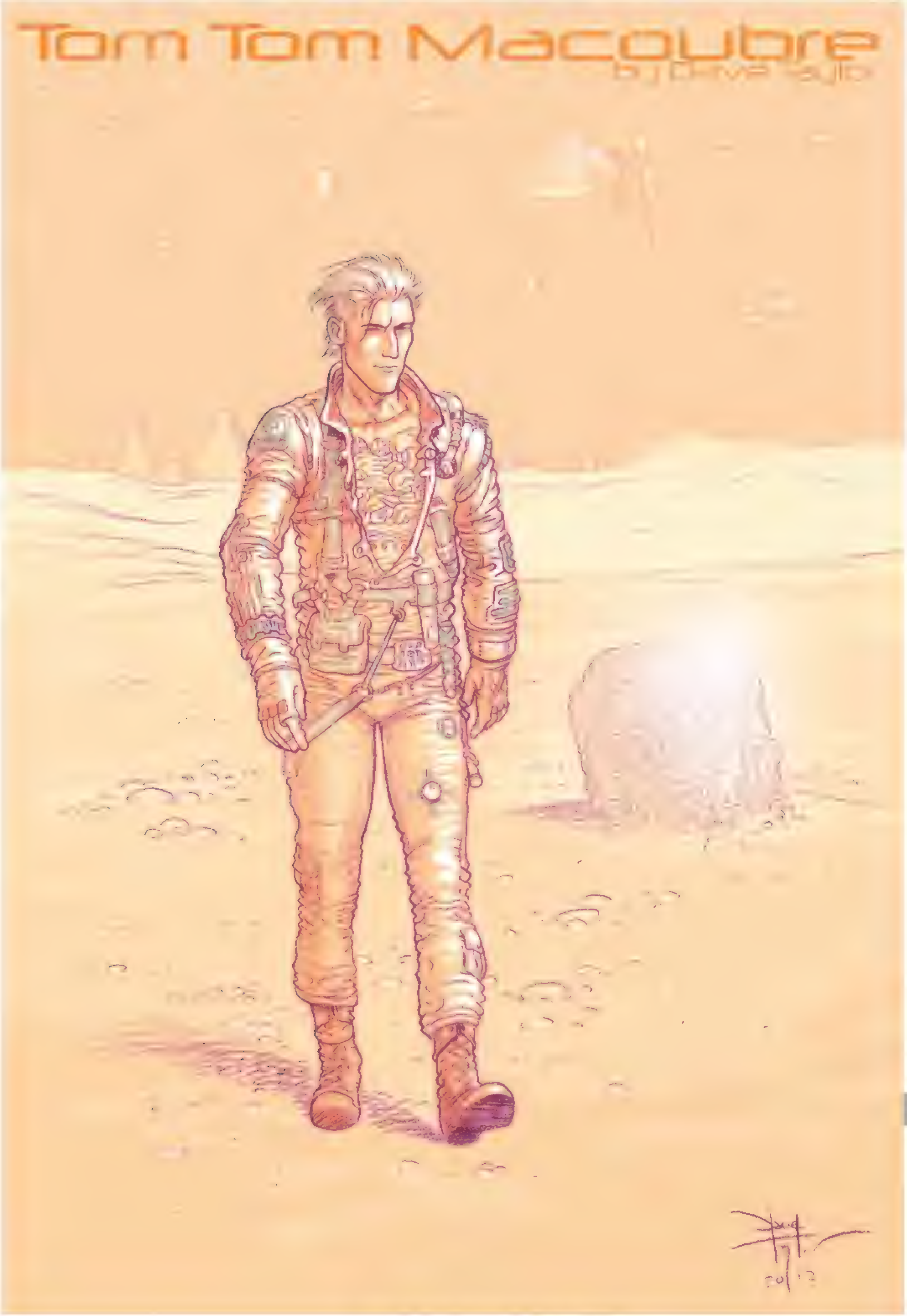
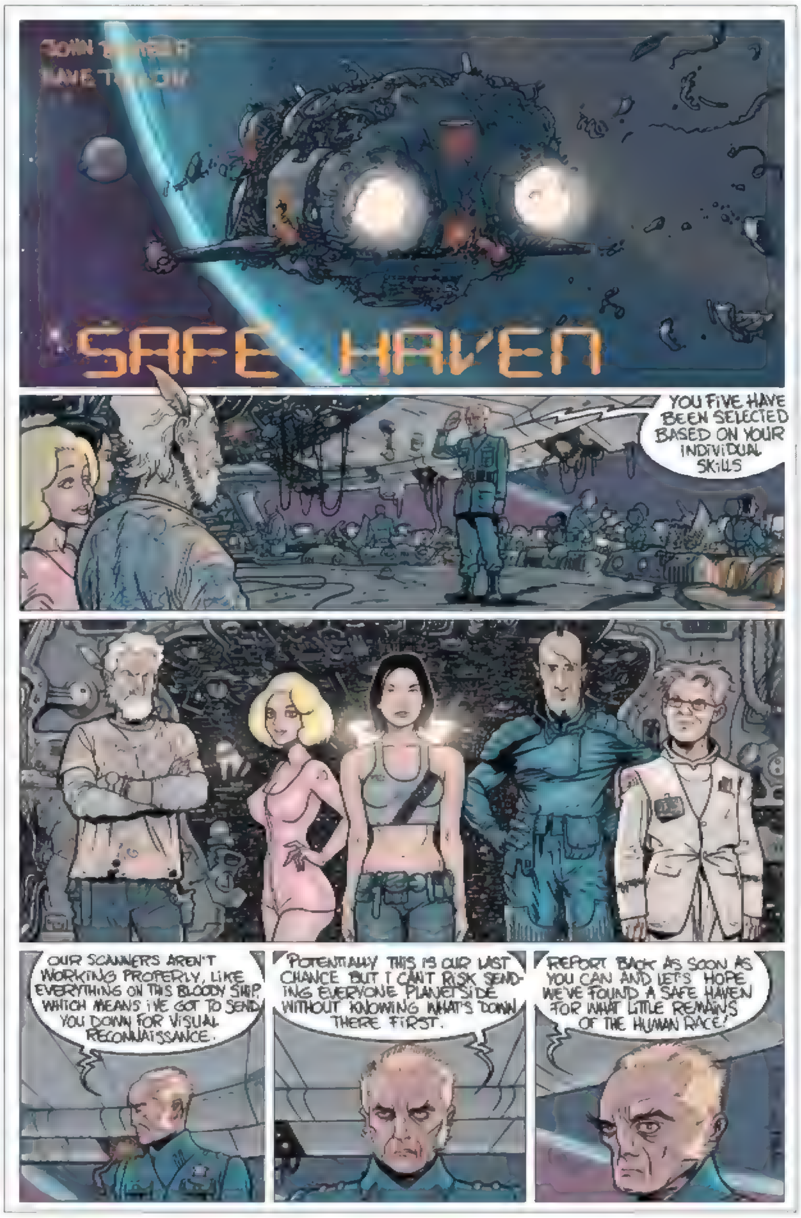

Tom Tom Macoubre
by Dave Taylor
2013

4 TAYLOR GALLERY

SAFE HAVEN

ANTHOLOGY, PRIVATE COMMISSION

"This page, from a privately commissioned job for an anthology, was a bit like a holiday. I did it while working on *Batman: Death By Design* – but don't tell DC that! I'm usually invited to do my own thing on most jobs but this one demanded it. The characters are designed from real people, requested by the writer, but otherwise it's pure imagination with no restrictions. There's a mix of inked work and scanned pencil (space backgrounds), which is something I'd been meaning to experiment with for a long time and will be implementing in *Tom Tom Macoubre*. It was also a pleasure to work on something that wasn't taking itself seriously; it's a very funny little story which added to my enjoying the holiday!"


SAFE HAVEN
YOU FIVE HAVE BEEN SELECTED BASED ON YOUR INDIVIDUAL SKILLS
OUR SCANNERS AREN'T WORKING PROPERLY, LIKE EVERYTHING ON THIS BLOODY SHIP, WHICH MEANS I'VE GOT TO SEND YOU DOWN FOR VISUAL RECONNAISSANCE.
POTENTIALLY THIS IS OUR LAST CHANCE BUT I CAN'T RISK SENDING EVERYONE PLANETSIDE WITHOUT KNOWING WHAT'S DOWN THERE FIRST.
REPORT BACK AS SOON AS YOU CAN AND LET'S HOPE WE'VE FOUND A SAFE HAVEN FOR WHAT LITTLE REMAINS OF THE HUMAN RACE!

5 TAYLOR GALLERY

TOM TOM MACOUBRE

GRAPHIC NOVEL, UNPUBLISHED

"When I started working on getting the first *Tom Tom* graphic novel written I realised I'd not drawn him for many years so came up with this, as a test-run for myself. In the story he changes many times, becomes many seemingly different people, but always comes back to 'his core self'. Thanks to many years working in comics as purely a penciller, I've developed a very tight method, which I found I could scan and colour with no need to ink. This is an example of that process. You might notice a Mayan influence here, something that fascinates me a great deal – something I picked up while working on *Tongue Lash*."

'Moebius' Giraud won me over as my mentor. He could do it all! But without that initial mind expansion by the *2000 AD* artists, I would never have grown in the direction I eventually did."

CH: You seem to experiment with the look of your art, moving from straight line art to soft pencils and even painted work on occasion. Do you enjoy playing around with the look and feel of your work?
DT: "I'm fascinated by all forms of artistic expression. Both my parents were art lovers, including a deep respect for music, so from a very early age I've been aware of creativity on all levels. I'd love to live for 1,000 years and become master in all art forms! I think because I was inspired by so many different artists that I can't now just stick to one style, one expression. I approach each job with a fresh and open mind, wishing to explore all possibilities in an attempt to always tell a story in its own unique way."

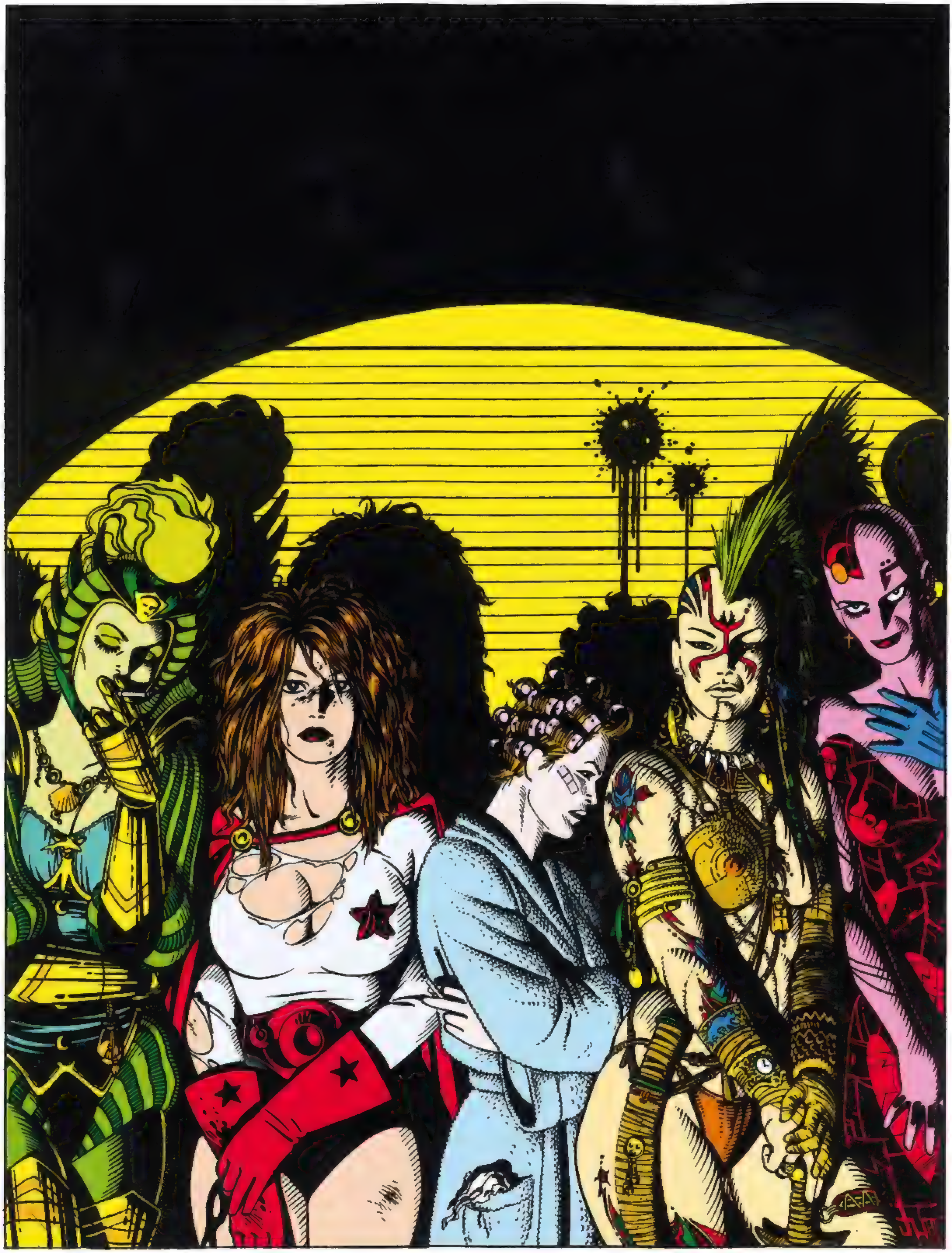
CH: You're currently writing and drawing a *Batman Black And White* story. Do you feel that you now have the extra confidence required to write and draw the character that you perhaps didn't have say a decade ago?
DT: "Yes, absolutely. I'm no longer living in my old self-imposed stylistic prison. I used to write my own comics before I went pro, but being dyslexic I suffered from, again, a self-imposed restriction of confidence. I've learned a great deal from reading and working on professional scripts by the likes of Alan Grant, Matt Wagner, John Wagner, Robbie Morrison, Ian Edginton and others. It's been a wonderful education. Experience is the best teacher."

CH: Are we likely to see other projects where you both write and draw?
DT: "That's all I've ever really wanted to do. I deeply love working with creative minds and I know I could never fully give that up, but I do have an intense desire to be self-sufficient and to tell my own stories. The few I've done recently, *Batman*, my own graphic novel and a handful of one-page things for a UFO magazine have all given me the confidence to do more, to become an all-round storyteller."

CH: What news is there on your creator-owned series *Tom Tom Macoubre*?
DT: "I self-published a 20-page *Tom Tom Macoubre* comic back in the late '80s, which I showed to Moebius at a London comic con (UKCAC). He really liked it, asked if he could keep a copy, and laughed when he spotted a direct swipe of one of his drawings on a page. He said, as I was asking for advice, that if I wanted to be a pro then on the strength of this I should go for it, but seriously consider getting a better education in 'classical art', which I did later attempt to do.

"The book, as it was then, was only a 20-page sample of a much greater story. I've recently been writing a much expanded version with the desire to eventually create at least three graphic novels.

"The original was a simple tale of good vs evil, I suppose: Tom Tom's innocence finally defeating a cosmic devil. It's now become a record of the weird and downright bizarre experiences I've witnessed over the years, including flying saucers, phone conversations with MIBs, trance state visions of extraterrestrial beings and ancient giants on the Moon... for starters! It's filled with my serious research into our human history and our many possible destinies, who and why we are. It's an exploration of scepticism vs belief, fear vs faith, knowledge vs naivety. I'm presently searching for the right publisher who could handle such material wisely and with respect." CH



BREAKING EVERY RULE

Jaime Hernandez and his brothers were behind the groundbreaking *Love And Rockets* – comics' answer to the punk revolution... By Paul Gravett

Flashback to 1981: in the true DIY spirit of punk and with some cash from their younger sibling Ismael, Los Bros Hernandez – three 20-something Latino brothers from Oxnard in Southern California – self-publish their first 32-page black-and-white comic and sell it for $1 a copy. They call it *Love And Rockets*.

Instead of the usual Comics Code Authority Seal on the front cover, they create a stamp stating "Fair Warning: This Comic Contains Raw Language, Violence and Nudity". Inside, they introduce themselves: "We, the brothers (Jaime, 'Bert and Mario) Hernandez, have tried to get into the comics jungle for a few years now, but could never seem to make the right connections. But now editor (and future contributor) Mario decided upon himself that it was time to do it ourselves. Our own comics with our own ideas; our own mistakes and our own accomplishments."

Their accomplishments would prove to be remarkable and help trigger a wave of alternative, subversive American comics in the '80s.

LITTLE MONSTER

Hawking their debut title at the June 1981 Creation Convention in Washington, DC, reactions and sales were mediocre. Back then, with Marvel and DC practically the only publishers in town, the brothers' ambitions to break into comics might have all ended there, if Gilbert hadn't dared to mail a review copy to Fantagraphics's *The Comics Journal*.

Gary Groth, the magazine's editor and a notoriously severe critic, wrote a rave notice: "First, *Love And Rockets* is the work of genuine imagination, a very, individual, idiosyncratic, and energetic imagination. Second, both Jaime and 'Bert deal with ideas, not pretentious nonsense or regurgitated pulp trappings. Finally, they've got the technical wherewithal that's always the necessary complement to the imagination."

Not long after, a publishing deal was agreed and in January 1982, Fantagraphics Books announced the release of an ongoing, more-or-less-quarterly 64-page *Love And Rockets* magazine. Within a few issues, oldest brother Mario dropped out, leaving Jaime and Gilbert to complete a first 15-year run of 50 issues in 1996. The pair then branched off onto solo projects, before relaunching *Love And Rockets* first as a 20-issue series from 2001 to 2007 and then, since 2008, as a series of annual 108-page anthologies. This year Jaime Hernandez won yet another Harvey Award, as Best Cartoonist, and after a gap of 25 years, returned to London for a sold-out interview with Woodrow Phoenix organised by Comica Festival.

Over three decades, Jaime and his readers have grown up with his characters, who have become like much-loved friends, even family. These are not corporate-owned properties passed from creator to creator to be endlessly retconned, rebooted and resurrected, but unique, complex fictions whose lives are being enriched and deepened by their originator and owner, who feels a genuine respect and responsibility for them.

Pivotal to his ever-evolving human drama are bisexual pro-solar mechanic Margarita Luisa Chascarillo and mostly lesbian punk rocker Esperanza Leticia Glass, or Maggie and Hopey to their friends; two "locas", mad, maddening and madly in love (on-and-off) with each other.

Jaime found inspiration for these forceful females in his widowed mother: "Our dad died when we were young and we were raised by our Mom. No matter what worries she was going through, she was this big grown-up person handling things. So that's where I get these take-charge women. I didn't realise these were rare in comics."

An avid comic book reader and rock fan in her youth, Jaime's mother passed on her passions to her sons, who devoured

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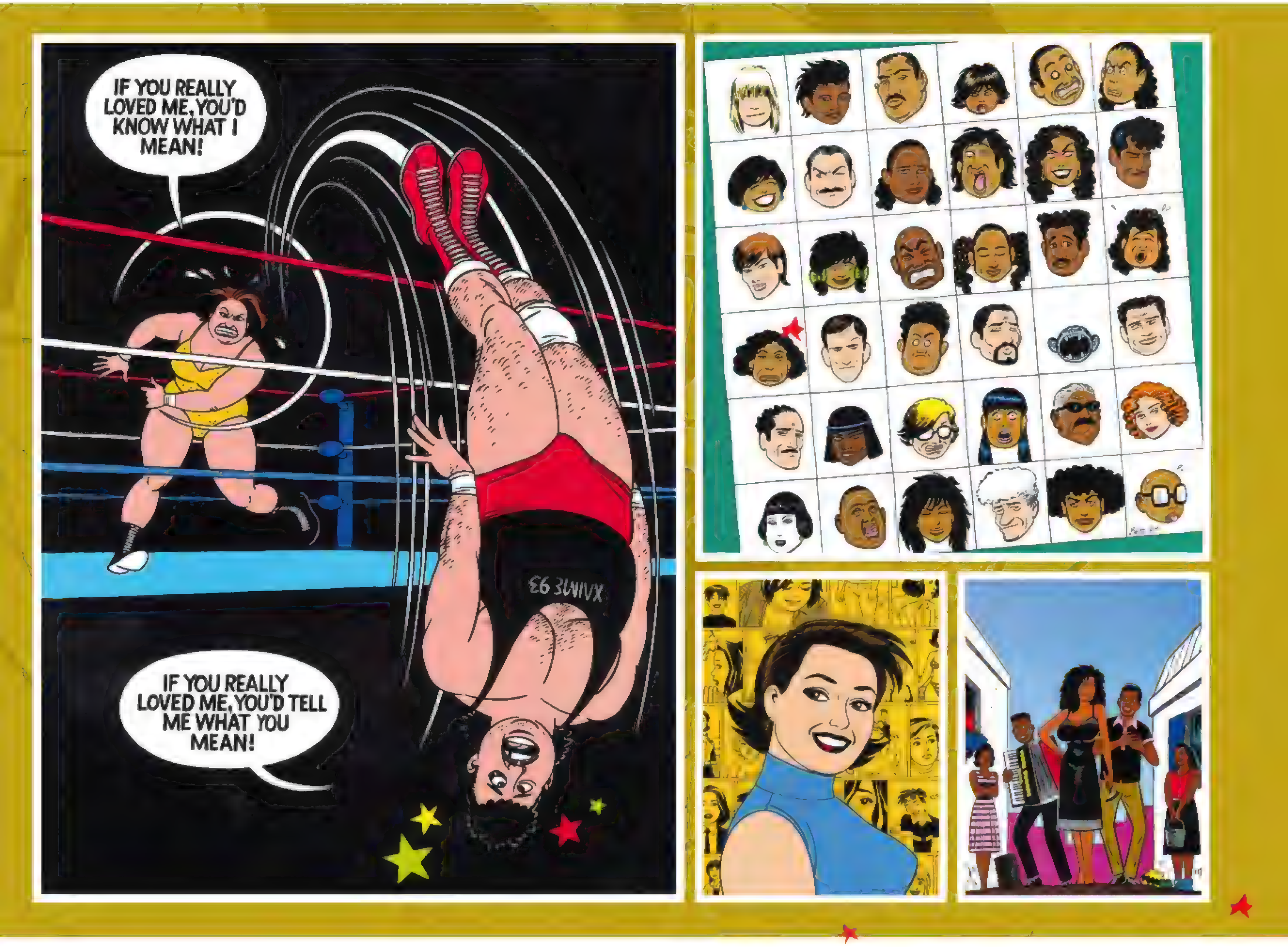
Opposite page: *Love And Rockets* #1: the cover was loosely based on the back cover of (US punk band) Black Flag's first single. Los Bros Hernandez thought "it was a good way to show the different kinds of women splattered all over comics."


IF YOU REALLY LOVED ME, YOU'D KNOW WHAT I MEAN!
IF YOU REALLY LOVED ME, YOU'D TELL ME WHAT YOU MEAN!

'60s Marvel and Archie comics and Hank Ketcham's *Dennis The Menace*, illustrated in comic books by Al Wiseman. She also nurtured their storytelling imagination with tales of her own. Jaime has never forgotten how, "My mum would open up the cedar chest and show me photos from Texas, where she was from. I used to love it; I was there. She'd tell this whole story about her being barefoot poor but make it sound so cool. 'You had no money? That's the best thing in the world.' So Gilbert and I put stuff we thought about and felt, like a photo or story, into our comics because it was so strong for us." Superheroes, dinosaurs, women wrestlers and other fantasy trappings may come and go, but that feeling of realism has kept the series grounded and vibrant.

What also sets *Love And Rockets* apart is its focus on Hispanic people, who, despite making up 17% of America's population, remain mostly invisible in the country's English-language entertainment industries. Jaime recalls, "When I created Maggie, her name was Maggie Chase. It never occurred to me, why am I drawing a white character if I am Latino? Then one day, Gilbert and I both went, 'Why aren't our characters Hispanic? Why don't we draw about what we know?' So we felt, let's show 'em what our life is like."

The lack of ethnic representations remains a problem in US comics. "Most alternative cartoonists are white, so they write about white people. It frustrates me sometimes. 'Why don't you guys stick a black character in there – it's easy. Just make them a different colour, you don't have to change their personality.'"

HEARTBREAK SOUP

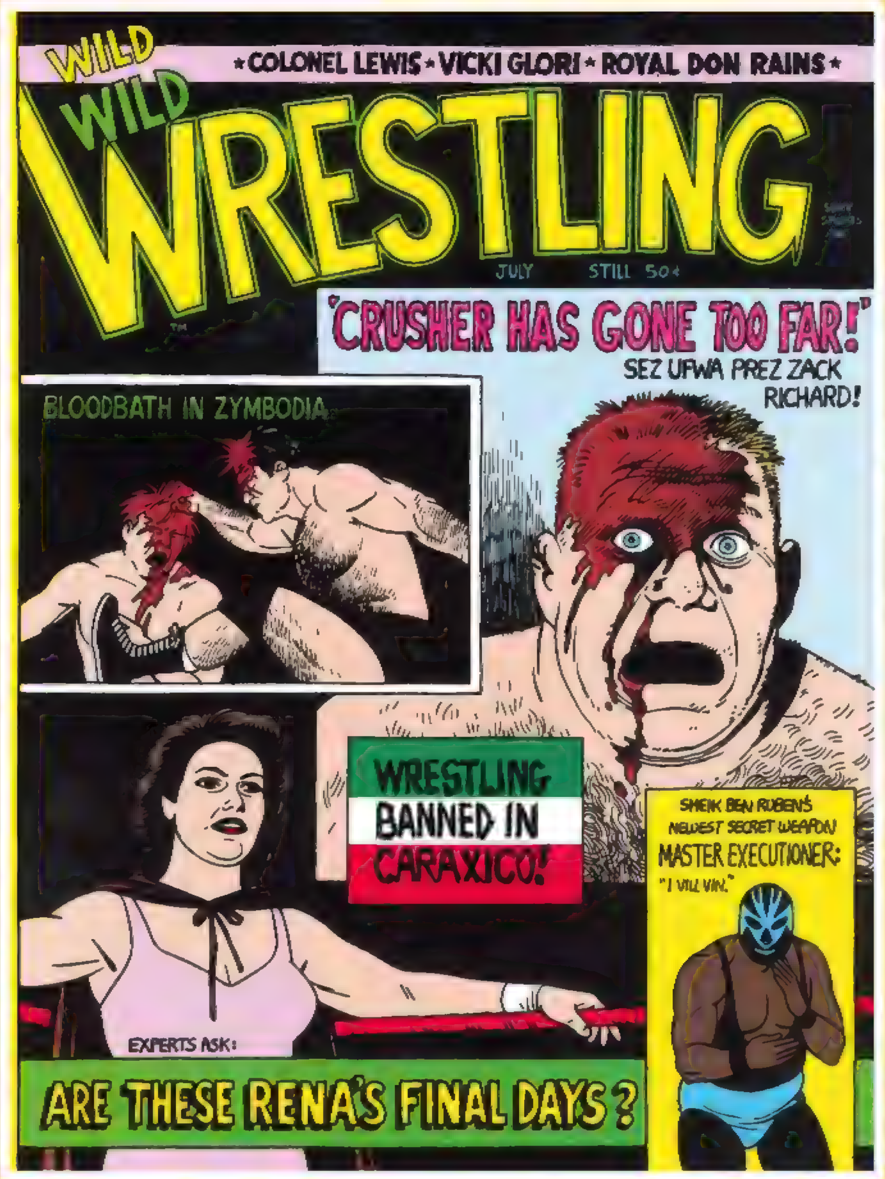
For an artist renowned for his convincing, nuanced portrayals of women, Jaime Hernandez properly connected with the opposite sex only when he was swept up in the LA punk scene, playing in local bands and designing posters. "All my childhood I was scared of girls… It wasn't until punk days, after high school, that I started meeting punk girls and I just loved their attitude, their sense of humour, the whole thing I put into Maggie and Hopey."

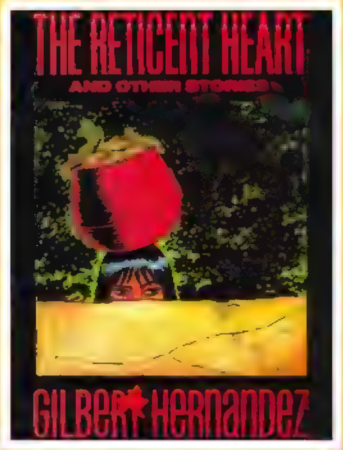
Few other comics artists have come close to Jaime's skills at capturing in pen and ink the crackling energy and life-changing importance of music when it becomes the soundtrack to your life, whether playing on stage in a rock band or being in the front row at a live gig.

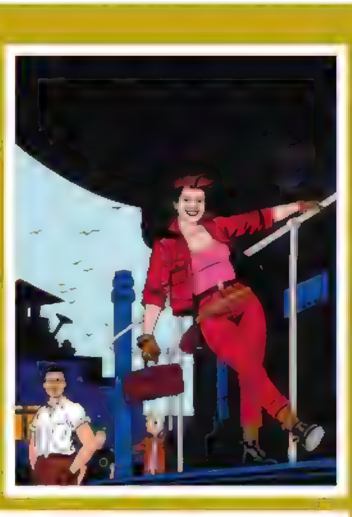
His punk experiences also educated him about sexual diversity. "I started to see women having relationships with other women. At first, I put this into my comics because anything goes, I could do stuff they've never done before in comics. So I made Maggie and Hopey lovers, but they're also best friends. And I knew I had to back it up. I could put in as many Latinos as I wanted, because I am one and have that experience. But when I started dealing with women, I had to think about it more, observe more. I had to be more careful with a lesbian character, because I'm not one. I tried my best not to take too much freedom with this, because I take responsibility for everything I do in the comic." Such sensitivity and dedication towards his characters is echoed in his readers' devotion to them.

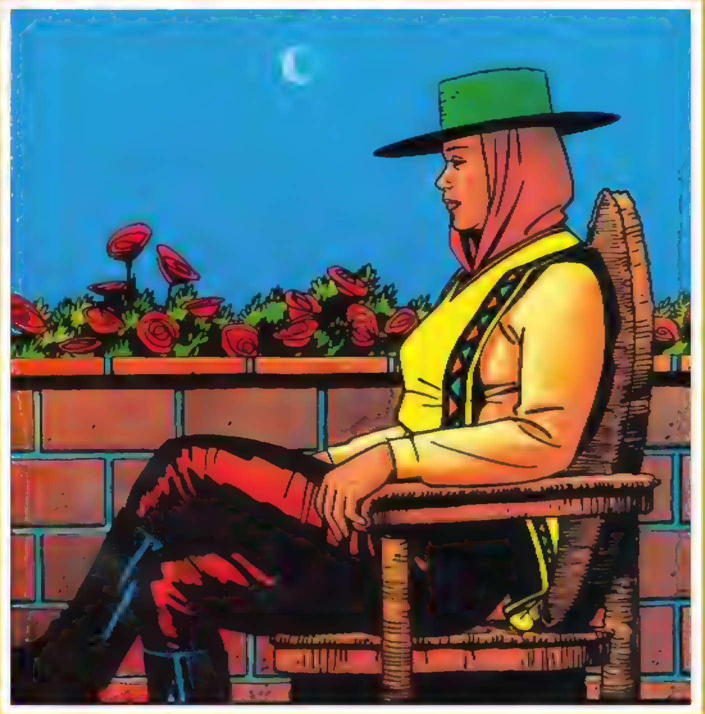
Over time his crisp linework in dip-pen became increasingly refined and purified, in harmony with his bravura balancing of solid blacks and white space. "The lines on

Above: Most of the key characters in *Love And Rockets* are Hispanic, almost unheard of in the comic-book world. And they're big on wrestling…


WILD WILD
★COLONEL LEWIS★VICKI GLORI★ROYAL DON RAINS★
WRESTLING
JULY STILL 50¢
"CRUSHER HAS GONE TOO FAR!"
SEZ UFWA PREZ ZACK RICHARD!
BLOODBATH IN ZYMBODIA
WRESTLING BANNED IN CARAXICO!
SHEIK BEN RUBEN'S NEWEST SECRET WEAPON! MASTER EXECUTIONER: "I VILL VIN."
EXPERTS ASK:
ARE THESE RENA'S FINAL DAYS?


THE RETICENT HEART
AND OTHER STORIES
GILBERT HERNANDEZ





“ If I try to draw a shapely woman, I want to know who she is – truthfully it’s sexier ”

paper have to make you believe that they are not lines on paper.”

Jaime’s drawing especially celebrates female sensuality and the beauty of the body in motion, without a hint of pandering exploitation. “If I want to draw these girls, there’s got to be an element of truth to it, not just a fantasy. When I was 13, Gilbert said, ‘You should start drawing girls, it’s fun.’ And I was like, ‘Mom’s gonna kill us!’ but I couldn’t help myself. Early on, I understood the whole sexism thing and knew that if I want to draw these characters, there’s got to be something more to it. I’ve never been able to draw a pin-up of a glamorous girl, if I didn’t know the character. If I try to draw a shapely woman, I want to know who she is, because truthfully it’s sexier. I need to add that spark of personality that makes her real to me.” And to his readers.

Contributing to this realism is the way Jaime moves fluidly back and forth through his characters’ lives and loves, fleshing out their childhoods and adulthoods, springing family secrets, devastating shocks and heart-rending resolutions, planting clues and leaving mysteries to be explained perhaps years later. “All this information is swimming in my head and one day it will be a story.”

Ignoring some readers’ objection, Jaime showed how Maggie, good-hearted though lacking in confidence, put on weight from overeating due to depression. He also boldly bumped the series forward in time to show Maggie in her forties as the manager, plump but still pretty, of a seedy LA apartment complex. And unexpectedly, in his latest graphic novel *God And Science* Jaime returns to his fantasy roots by mixing Maggie up with friends and tenants who turn out to be in rival teams of feisty superheroines. “I broke every rule I could think of doing superheroes, so guess what, all the women in the world are born with superpowers in them, as a gift or a curse, but some don’t get them till they mature.”

Free from boundaries, he totally restores faith in the genre, blending riotous banter, balletic fight scenes and girl power with tragedy and tenderness.

Don’t be put off by more than 30 years of Jaime’s tapestry of fascinating characters. The whole saga up to 2007 is available in five affordable, accessible graphic novels, plus the ongoing annuals. Start at the beginning and you’ll soon find the more you read about them, the more you come to care about them. CH

Above: Rumours that this Crusher was based on real-life wrestler Reginald “The Crusher” Lisowski are apparently unfounded.

All the images published here are from ***Love & Rockets: The Covers****, a “stunning oversized art book showcasing over 150 Iconic covers”, available now for £25.*

REPLY ALL

Marvel's Agents Of SHIELD

An assorted bunch of sci-fi hacks and comic book fans give some instant interactive email reactions to **Joss Whedon**'s latest TV show...

REPLYING ALL THIS ISSUE ARE:
DAVE GOLDER (your host and editor), **JAYNE NELSON** (telefantasy expert extraordinaire), **ALASDAIR STUART** (comics blogger), **STACEY WHITTLE** (comics blogger), **STEVEN ELLIS** (all-purpose geek) **JORDAN FARLEY** (hungover)

Our mission, because we chose to accept it: get online immediately after the premiere of Joss Whedon's small-screen spin-off of *The Avengers*, and let our instantaneous thoughts flow...

STEVE: "Manchester is ready with its scores..."

JAYNE: "Lola: 20 points."

ALASDAIR: "The FitzSimmons Close Harmony players: 10 points."

STEVE: "Maria Hill's hair: 8 points."

ALASDAIR: "The clear job lot SHIELD got of metal tactical briefcases with cool blue lights in them: 10 points!"

DAVE: "Weren't they just leftover covers from the *Marvel Phase One* Blu-ray collectors' edition?"

JORDAN: "Hearing the Mutant Enemy Grr, Argh on TV again – all the points."

DAVE: "You know what, I thought it was a great pilot but not a brilliant one... but I think that's a GOOD THING. It leaves room for improvement. It hasn't peaked too early."

STACEY: "I agree but the basics are all there: the set-up, the team, the hints at secrets to be revealed. The hopeless pining for Riddleston."

DAVE: "Riddleston. Is that a thing? Hiddleston channelling the Riddler?"

STACEY: "Goddamn fat fingers is what it is! :-D"

JAYNE: "I thought it rushed through a lot of things (and certainly didn't make any allowances for the three people in the audience who hadn't seen *The Avengers*). But it was smart, it was funny, and it had that wonderful gag about the broken bulb that had me in fits for so long I missed about four subsequent plot points."

STEVE: "I thought it was great. It *almost* lived up to the hype. Which in this day of multiple trailers, clips and pre-release momentum is pretty good. There were only one or two moments that didn't work for me. One or two lines that felt a little too glib or knowing. A slight over-Whedoning here and there."

ALASDAIR: "I really liked the tone of it. It would have been really easy to do a show like this filled with Jack Bauer-style macho nonsense. Reminded me a lot of the Warren Ellis/John Cassaday series *Planetary* actually."

STACEY: "I didn't mind the over-Whedoning. He's the king of it. For me, the humour totally lifted it from 'Okay' to 'Definitely watching episode two.'"

STEVE: "I loved the tone. I do like that there's a lightness to it which has been missing from sci-fi TV."

ALASDAIR: "The one clunky bit, I felt, was, '...AND PHIL MUST NEVER KNOW THE AWFUL TRUTH ABOUT WHAT HAPPENED TO HIM!' I actually hope when we get the reveal, Coulson just says, 'Oh yeah, that. Already figured it out. We're good.'"

JAYNE: "Damn, Alasdair, you just figured out an upcoming plot point. Of COURSE he knows."

STEVE: "Yeah. That feels right. I loved Coulson. I could watch an hour of Coulson doing stand-up or even just smiling wryly at the screen."

JORDAN: "I particularly love that a middle-aged bloke with a receding hairline is the star of probably the most exciting thing on TV right now."

JAYNE: "I wasn't sure about Skye. She just seemed like Faith #2 to me."

STEVE: "Yeah. She really reminded me off Dushku too."

ALASDAIR: "Skye is the most insanely well-dressed, well-scrubbed hacker/anarchist/van person in the history of history. The actress is solid but I hope there's more to the character."

STACEY: "To be fair, they can't really win with that. If they'd made her more geeky it would have got people's backs up for being clichéd."

ALASDAIR: "Excellent point. Plus some of her line delivery was perfect. I adored the chirpy 'They're coming for you!'"

DAVE: "I thought all hackers were like Angelina Jolie."

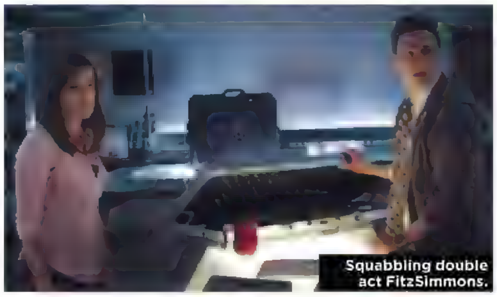
A 21st century SHIELD.

Safe cracking SHIELD-style.

So just what is the new "normal"?

Skye: too clean cut for a hacktivist?

It is, indeed, a "really nice bus".



Squabbling double act FitzSimmons.

> “I loved Coulson. I could watch an hour of Coulson doing stand-up or even just smiling wryly at the screen”

ALASDAIR: “Male ones are all Johnny Lee Miller. Been scientifically proven. By scientists who all look like Walter Bishop.”

STACEY: “It looks like Cobie Smulders isn't a series regular. I think that's a shame, I like her character.”

JAYNE: “And the bickering scientists... Jesus, I couldn't hear a damn word they said. They drove me mad. Is this a thing now? We had them in *Pacific Rim* as well!”

DAVE: “I liked the bickering scientists, but I'm so mutton I watched it with subtitles on...”

JAYNE: “People who aren't deaf shouldn't have to watch with subtitles on! I know we weren't supposed to hear some of it (when they talked over each other) but when they did turn to camera and speak, it was still nonsense.”

STEVE: “Anyone else have *Torchwood* moments?”

JORDAN: “Definitely. I think James Moran said it best: ‘Really enjoyed Marvel's Agents Of Torchwood. Nice to see the SUV again. Not sure why Owen was Scottish, but great fun.’”

ALASDAIR: “It felt very *Torchwood*-y but actually addressed the one thing about *Torchwood* that always irritated me. The show never, ever paid off Jack's, ‘The 21st century is where everything changes' line. Every single massive global event got handwaved away. I loved that here, the massive event, the Battle of New York, has happened and people are actually reacting to it.”

DAVE: “It was a totally different vibe. It's like saying *House Of Cards* is like *Yes, Prime Minister*.”

STACEY: “J August Richards was really good as Not-Power-Man. He didn't overplay it at the end which would have been awful.”

JORDAN: “He was superb. Especially the final confrontation with Coulson, which had some proper emotion lacking in the rest of it.”

Has he spotted Black Widow's bottom?

ALASDAIR: “I especially liked his, ‘No, this is an origin story,' moment. Interesting way to address the idea of superhumanity as both a psychosis and an escape fantasy.”

DAVE: “It's a Whedon show, so who's going to die first?”

ALASDAIR: “Half of the FitzSimmons gestalt. Probably Iain De Caestecker. The real question is, will he go to ‘Tahiti' too?”

JORDAN: “I really hope not. I actually found their double-play a lot of fun and perfectly intelligible (though I do sit about five feet away from my TV).”

ALASDAIR: “Or... They all die. Season finale. Huge explosion and... They all wake up on a beach. Ron Glass steps out from behind something and says, ‘Welcome to Tahiti'. Roll end credits. Best end of season since, ‘Mr Worf... Fire!'”

JAYNE: “I was about to say Whedon's outdone himself here by killing off a character BEFORE the closing credits. But then I, uh, remembered *Angel*...”

JORDAN: “One thing about the opening scene of the episode got me wondering – if they're selling ‘Heroes of New York' action figures does that mean that in the Avengers universe someone could make a movie/TV show about the Avengers?”

DAVE: “Enrico Colantoni to play Joss Whedon!”

JAYNE: “OH MY GOD – I'm so glad you reminded me of the action figures. Guys, guys, guys – go to that scene and have a look at Black Widow's arse. LOOK AT IT. It's huge. It must have been a gag at the expense of unrealistic depictions of women in comics, surely?”

STEVE: “I also wonder what'll happen if Lola gets up to 88mph...”

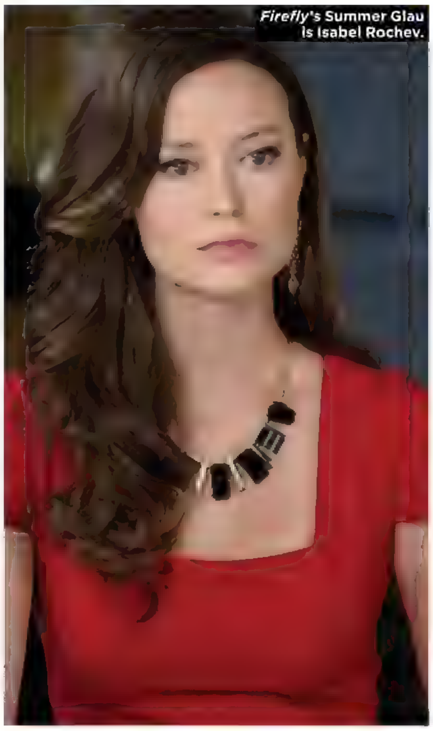
Lola's got a few tricks up her wheel arches...

OLIVER'S ARMY

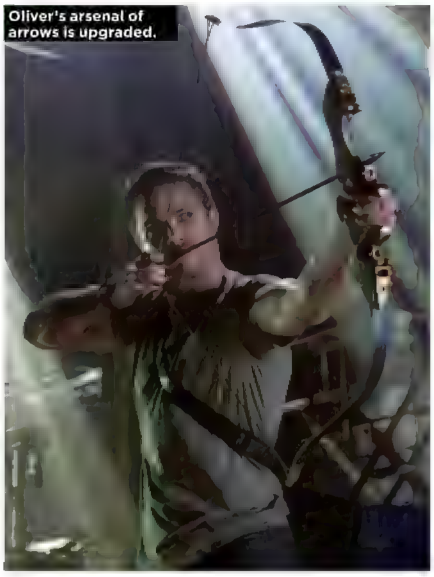
Arrow hit the bullseye with viewers during its first season, but will that success be evergreen? The show's creators tell **Comic Heroes** how season two steps things up a notch

WorldMags.net

Roy and Thea get closer than ever.



Firefly's Summer Glau is Isabel Rochev.



Oliver's arsenal of arrows is upgraded.

Expect more island flashbacks.

The curse of the second season – you know the pattern: a show whips up a fervent fan base with its first season, only to let them down with the second. While the first season can wow with the shock of the new, the second has more to prove. And *Arrow* certainly has a vocal fanbase to please now after a hugely successful first season.

Executive producers Marc Guggenheim and Andrew Kreisberg are tackling the difficult second season by treating each like a movie. "We tried to approach season two as a sequel," says Guggenheim. "If season one was a 23-hour movie, this is a 23-hour sequel."

Well, it makes a nice change from TV producers trying to convince us that they're making a mini-movie *every week*. And it makes more sense.

"I don't subscribe to Joss Whedon's theory that all sequels need to be completely different from their previous movie," says Guggenheim. "But I do think that they need to have their own identity and theme. We definitely have those in season two of *Arrow*."

TOMMY'S GONE

Part of the change of tone is dictated by a major plot bomb from season one's finale: the tragic death of Oliver's best friend Tommy Merlyn.

"Tommy's death is going to affect everybody this season," Kreisberg tells *Comic Heroes*. "It was one of the most difficult things we ever did, as producers and friends of [actor] Colin Donnell, whom we cherish as both a friend and a partner.

"But part of the calculation was that Tommy's death would have an impact on *all* the characters. It impacted Oliver, it impacted Laurel. It certainly impacted Moira and Malcolm as well. Last season Oliver was being driven by the ghost of his father, and this season he's being driven by the ghost of Tommy. Whereas last year it was a mission of vengeance, this year it's really much more of a mission of hope."

"We always had an overarching plan," says Guggenheim of the pair's approach to *Arrow*'s future. "In the sense that we'd always spoken in terms of what season two and three could be about. The further out in the future we get the less clear those pictures are… but we've always approached each season as its own movie. That was definitely the case last year and it's certainly the case this year. Like any sort of movie franchise, *Arrow*'s telling a larger three, four, five-part story, but each part has to be its own animal and have its own shape and its own theme."

Part of *Arrow*'s identity is in its unique approach to Oliver's backstory. Through an ongoing series of flashbacks, viewers learn of the events that shaped the emerald archer, even as they watch his present-day adventures unfold. Kreisberg says the pair still hope to tell this flashback tale throughout the course of the show.

"That was always the idea, that we'd be telling two stories. And however long the series goes, the very last flashback in the last episode of the series would be Oliver looking up and seeing the boat. Which was the very first scene in the pilot. There would be a loop. No one's ever really attempted that before. We're gluttons for punishment, so we're gonna see if we can pull it off. But right now it's one of the most exciting elements of the show, that we're constantly flashing back to this dual adventure.

> "Last year it was a mission of vengeance, this year it's more a mission of hope"

Opposite page: The stars of season two – events pick up some time after season one's dramatic finale and Oliver has fled Starling City.

"Stephen is truly remarkable in how he's able to differentiate between what we call 'island Oliver' and present-day Oliver. They're really two distinct characters, yet you see the seeds in the past of the man »

All images © 2013 Warner Bros Entertainment Inc.

A swanky bar fit for a millionaire playboy.

that Oliver's gonna grow into. This season we've gotten a better handle on how we can use the differences in their world views and their abilities to be more illuminating in the storytelling."

According to Kreisberg, this season will also shed some light on the background of its supporting characters, chief among them Oliver's right-hand man John Diggle (David Ramsey).

"We're doing a Diggle-centric episode this season. It will be episode six, entitled 'Keep Your Enemies Closer'. We'll delve a little bit more into Digg's background, which we're really excited about.

"Audrey Anderson is returning this season as Lyla Michaels, who is someone from his past that we met last season. What's great about season two is that people have hopefully fallen in love with these characters. Now we have the opportunity and the real estate to spend more quality time with them."

Longtime *Green Arrow* comic fans may be especially intrigued by where the show takes Oliver's sister Thea (Willa Holland) – whom he calls "Speedy" – and her new beau Roy Harper (Colton Haynes), which is the name of comic-book Speedy's alter ego. Will one of the two emerge to fight alongside Oliver as his sidekick, like the Speedy of the comics?

"We always say we have two sets of fans to cater to," says Kreisberg. "There are the fans who have never picked up a comic and the ones who know every version of *Green Arrow* forwards and backwards. We have to make them both happy.

"Part of why we've introduced the mystery of who will be Speedy is for the non-comic-book fans, who are just happy to go on the ride, and for the diehards, who don't want to feel they're just being spoon-fed a story they're expecting; so they can really enjoy the twists and the turns. How Thea and Roy evolve character-wise into the Arrow's aspect of the show will be one of the many surprises this season."

SUMMER'S SEASON

This year will see several new faces in the show's recurring cast, playing characters pulled directly from the comics, including genre favourite Summer Glau as Oliver's business nemesis Isabel Rochev.

"Summer is the nicest person you'll ever meet," laughs Kreisberg. "She's also an amazing actress. She said to me on day one, 'I've never played anybody like this before.' And she really hasn't. Especially early on, she's more of an antagonist for Oliver than she is for the Arrow. Summer's played so many quirky, kooky but deadly violent characters like River on *Firefly* and in *The Cape*. It's really fun to see her playing a different kind of character."

"I don't know what Summer's schedule is," adds Guggenheim. "It turns into an actor availability issue, but our hope is that we will see her throughout the season. She's already become a wonderful addition to the cast. Once the audience gets a taste of her they'll want to see more."

As for what other DC characters are waiting in the wings: "We've got Bronze Tiger," says Kreisberg, "who's certainly a comic-book fan favourite, played by Michael Jai White from *Spawn* and *The Dark Knight*. Caity Lotz is playing a version of the Black Canary, which we're excited about. Amanda Waller, who is the head of ARGUS, will be making an appearance. So, like last season, we didn't set out to bring in as many DC comics characters as we possibly could. We came up with the best stories, then looked at whether there were characters in the DC stable that we could use. We've actually found this season that there were a lot of ways to bring new people in, but then also include some fan favourites – like China White, played by Kelly Hu.

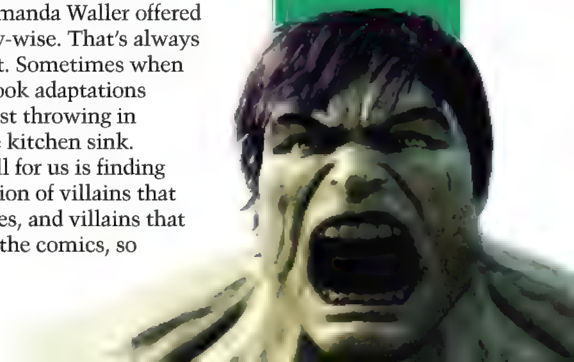
"It really is on a case-by-case basis. We don't sit here and think, 'Gee, it'd be great if we did Batman!' For example, it just worked out that Amanda Waller offered the best route story-wise. That's always what serves us best. Sometimes when people do comic-book adaptations it's a question of just throwing in everything *and* the kitchen sink. What's worked well for us is finding the right combination of villains that we created ourselves, and villains that people know from the comics, so

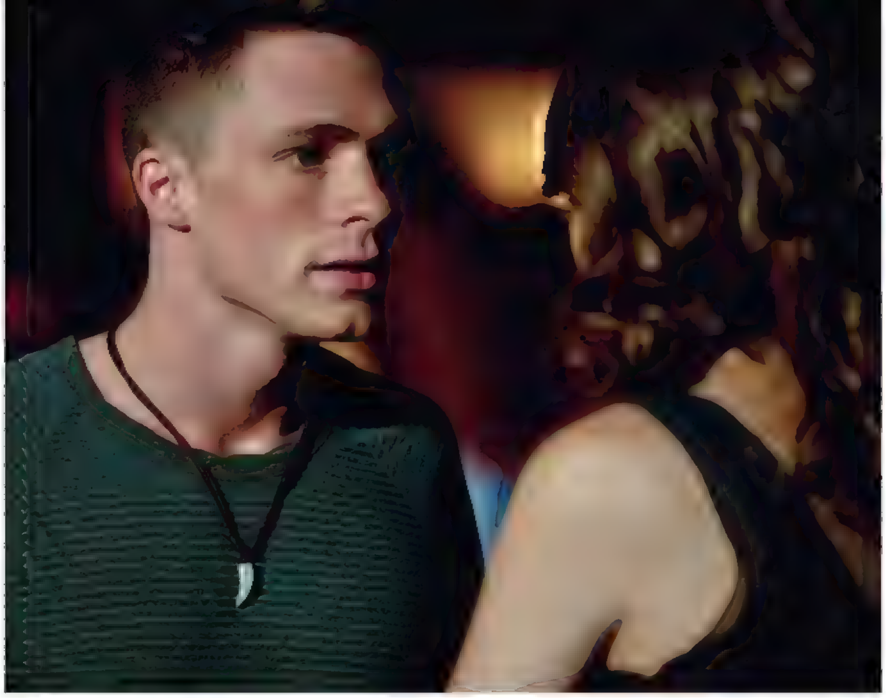
10* MORE GREEN SUPERHEROES

For a colour that's associated with illness and jealously, green is a surprisingly popular choice for the super-fraternity...

- The Hulk
- The Green Hornet
- Green Lantern
- Polaris
- Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles (x 4)
- Martian Manhunter
- Swamp Thing
- Poison Ivy
- She-Hulk
- Green Power Ranger

**Or 13, depending how you're counting*





it doesn't feel like an overwhelming comic-book show."

"Obviously the Flash is a very different kettle of fish," explains Kreisberg of DC's iconic scarlet speedster's hotly anticipated three-episode appearance this season. "That decision was made well above my head! But our characters won't shrug this off like, 'Oh, hey, there's a guy who can go super fast.' Everyone will have the kind of reactions that we'd have – the news, the police, the public. Some people will be sceptical, some people will be fearful, and some people will think it's the most amazing thing that's ever happened."

Almost as beloved by comic fans as the Flash are his enemies, whom Kreisberg believes will appear in the Flash's eventual spin-off show. "I just know from working with Jeph [Loeb] that second to Batman and maybe Spider-Man, the Flash has the best rogues gallery of all time. But all of those characters will hopefully be able to appear on a potential Flash series. Obviously we will 'Flash' them the same way we 'Arrow'd a lot of *Green Arrow*'s villains, to make them a little less comic-booky and a little bit more reality based. But yeah, that's certainly the hope."

While comics staple Amanda Waller appeared in the *Green Lantern* film, she's not the only character used in a recent DC live-action movie that will appear this year on *Arrow*. For example, the season's fifth episode, "The League Of Assassins", is named after the society featured in Christopher Nolan's *Batman* films (under the moniker "The League Of Shadows").

"DC's been really generous with giving us access to their toy box," says Guggenheim. "I would say using the League Of Assassins is not so much a function of the success of the show as it is a function of the fact that the further away we get in time from the Chris Nolan *Batman* trilogy the easier those conversations are to have."

PREMIER LEAGUE

Might we someday see DC link its TV and movie universes, as Marvel is now doing with its films and *Agents of SHIELD*?

"With respect to combining the cinematic and television universes," laughs Guggenheim, "unfortunately those decisions get made waaay above my head. So I actually stand with your readers; I have the same amount of information that they do. I'm not even being coy. I really don't know. The League Of Assassins is something we wanted to name-drop in the finale last year but it came in 23 minutes over time so we had to cut it. So one of the items on our season two to-do list was, 'Oh, we gotta get the League Of Assassins back in there somehow!' We're doing some fun things with them. We're obviously big fans of the DC Universe, and whenever we get to play with a new toy we like to make it worth our while, and hopefully by extension the audience's while."

Before the two execs leave us for the day, Kreisberg mentions that, in addition to all the new faces this year, we can expect to see plenty of new arrows.

"We will definitely get to see a lot more trick arrows. Now that Team Arrow really is a full-fledged team, Felicity [Emily Bett Rickards] is excited by the prospect of some of this new technology. Oliver's mission statement this season is to be a hero – he's not so quick to put an arrow in someone's chest and kill him. So there are a lot more non-lethal weapons at his disposal. It's always fun to see him reach back in his quiver, and, hopefully, this season you'll be excited because you're not quite sure what he's gonna shoot your way." CH

> **"DC has been really generous with giving us access to their toy box"**

Above: Season two promises to delve deeper into the backstories of established favourites, while introducing a raft of exciting new faces.

***Arrow** season 2 is currently airing in the UK on Sky 1.*

Cult comics character OCTOBRIANA returns!
The New Amazons
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NEW COMICS REVIEWED, RATED, AND ARGUED OVER, SOMETIMES ENDLESSLY

Extended Family

Our ratings explained, Super-family style. Who's the embarassing uncle?

SUPERGIRL	★★★★★
SUPERBOY	★★★★
KRYPTO	★★★
BEPPO	★★
SUPER-HORSE	★

This Issue's Highlights

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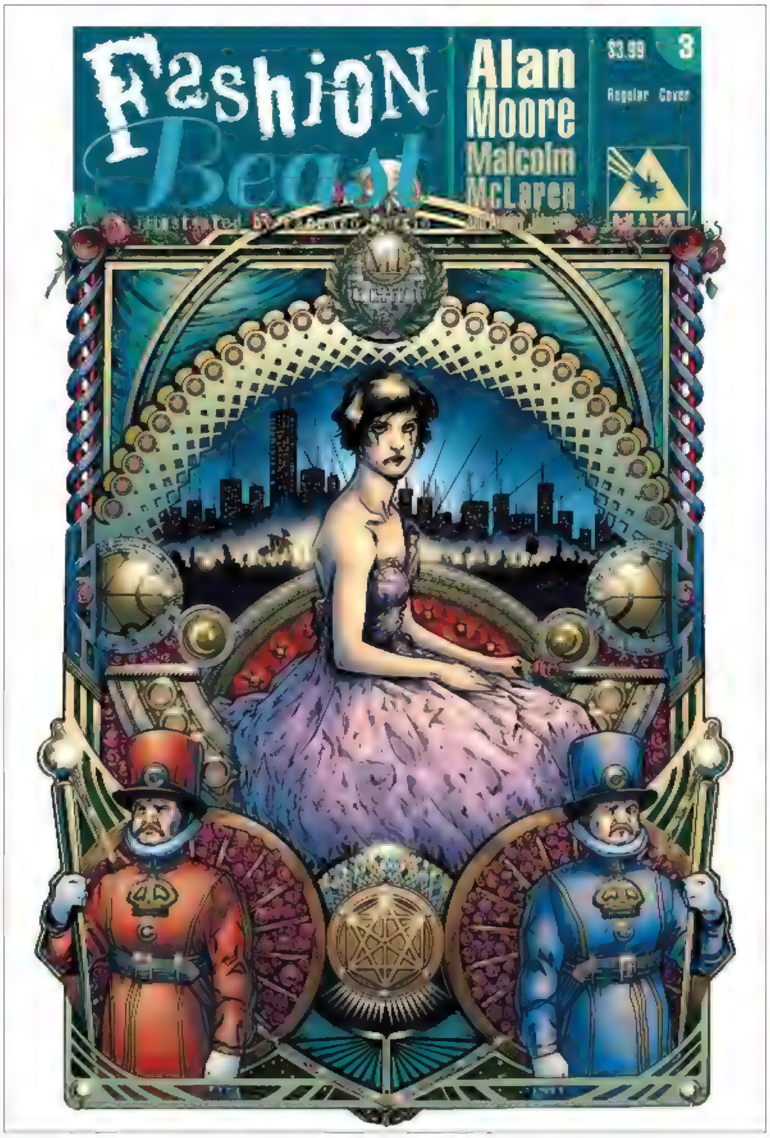
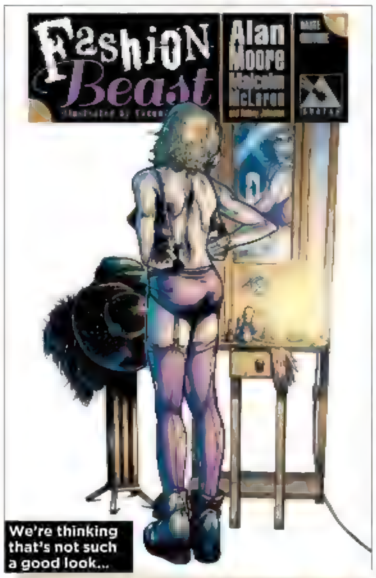
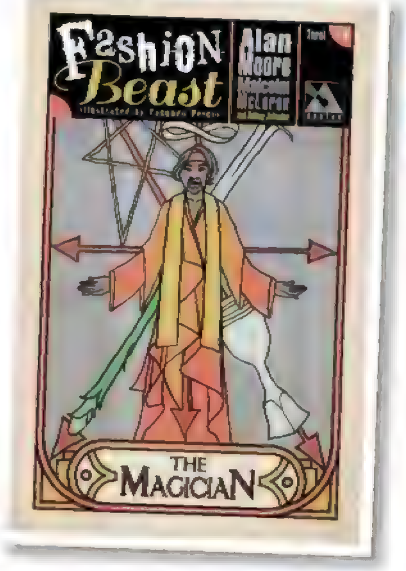
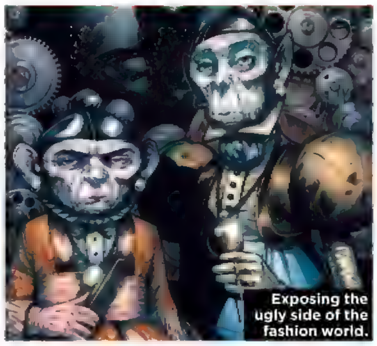




We're thinking that's not such a good look...

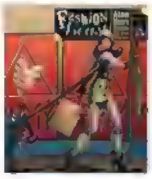




Exposing the ugly side of the fashion world.

FASHION BEAST

WRITERS: Alan Moore, Malcolm McLaren, Antony Johnston
ARTIST: Facundo Percio
PUBLISHER: Avatar
OUT: Now
★★★★



Adapted by Antony Johnston from a screenplay by Alan Moore commissioned by Malcolm McLaren for a film that never was, *Fashion Beast* offers us a grim fairytale set in the unreal otherworld that is the fashion industry.

Jean-Claude Celestine is a reclusive genius designer, sequestered away in his studio, turning out beautiful clothes for an ugly world. Doll Seguin, a girl who looks like a boy who dresses like a girl, blags her way into becoming Celestine's principal model and ultimately his muse, much to the chagrin of ambitious assistant Jonni Tare, a boy who looks like a girl who dresses like a boy. It's *Beauty And The Beast* recast as an apocalyptic enquiry into superficiality, gender stereotyping, and the politics of what you wear.

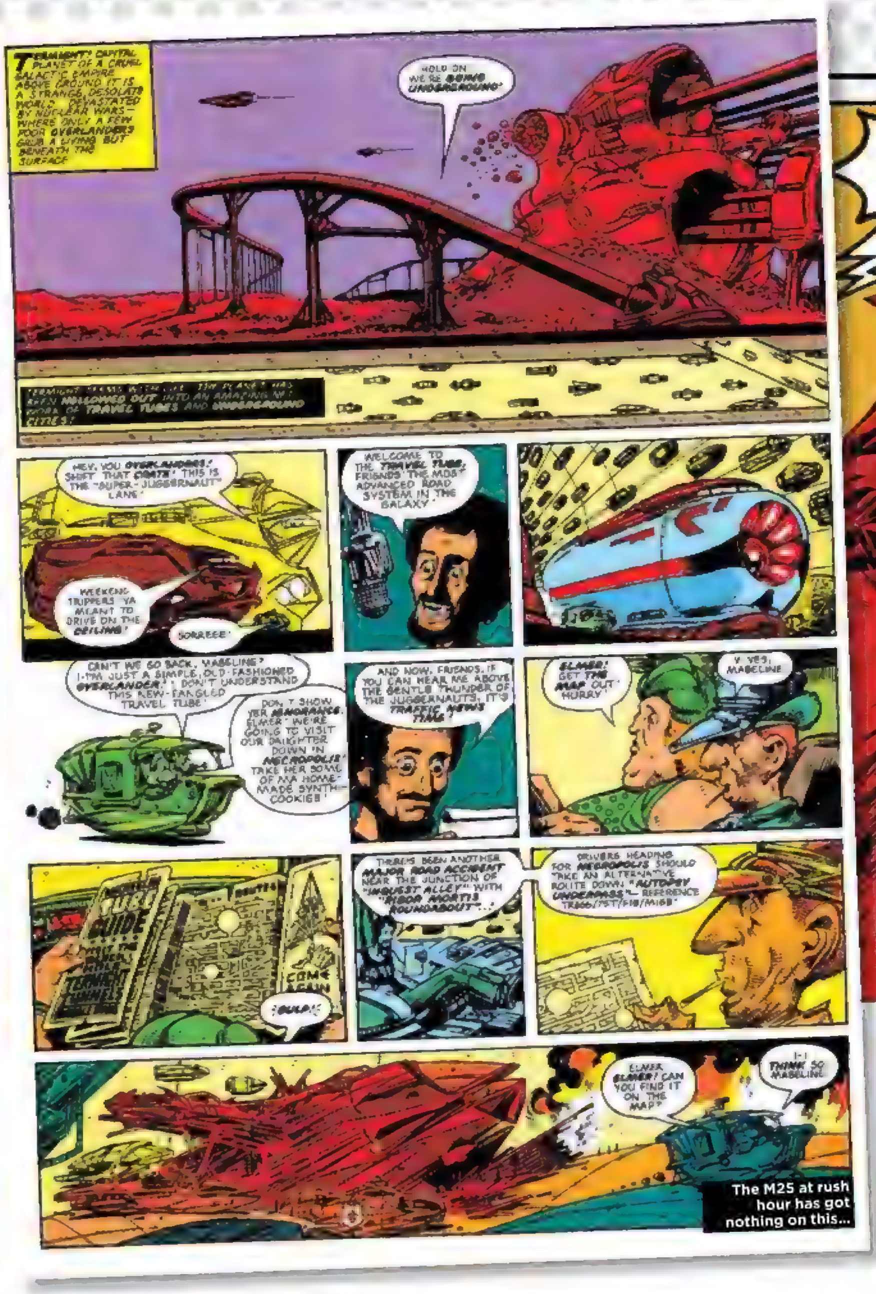
Typically Moore-ish moments surface amid a story laden with shrill bitchiness and plastic grotesquerie. A lengthy, eloquently verbose diatribe by Celestine arguing that fashion is a law of nature – "Sheathing its featherless, furless paw within a glove of animal velvet, [mankind] took evolution by the throat and shook it 'til it screamed... for in the image there is power!" – ultimately comes to rest on the association of "glamour" with magic. A scene in which one character fetishistically dresses another oozes with as much eroticism as though it were an act of undressing instead. The opening sequence, set in different rooms of a boarding house as the tenants get ready for a night out, recalls the superbly orchestrated street scenes of *Watchmen*.

The setting is a nameless, timeless city which blends past, present and possibly future; yet you can tell that the original storyline dates back to the late '80s or early '90s (Moore, in his witty foreword, confesses that he isn't sure himself when he and Sex Pistols impresario McLaren first conceived the idea together – "frankly, the 20th century was a bit of a blur").

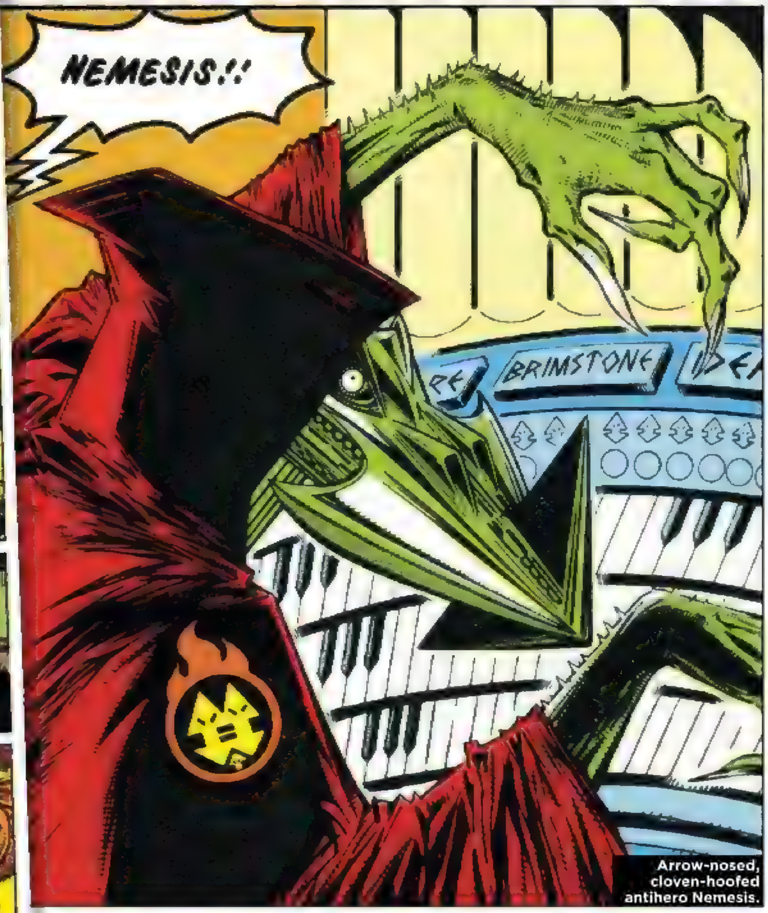
The threat of a nuclear winter and the fear of conscription into an endless war loom in the background, and the lyrics of a song celebrate the ever so briefly trendy dance style of vogueing, popularised by Madonna. We live in a different age now, with different terrors... although Madonna is still here.

The art by Facundo Percio, who also drew Warren Ellis's *Anna Mercury*, is typical of an Avatar publication. It's scratchy, unpolished, inconsistent, and hampered by a garish colouring job. However, he handles with some skill the use of repeating panels that the script demands, and the androgyny of the two main characters is well conveyed.

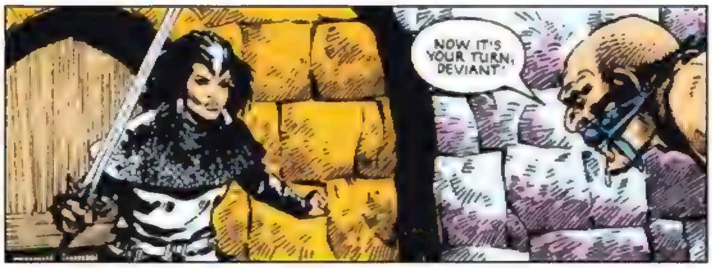
Is this, then, a lost Moore classic resurrected, or just another case of Avatar cobbling together scraps from the Sage of Northampton's non-comics backlist? We're going to plump for the former. The haunting, tragic love story at the heart of *Fashion Beast* is strong enough to transcend the flaws in execution here – the skimpy plot, the slow pace, the unattractive illustration. True beauty shines through, even in rags. **James Lovegrove**


TERMIGHT! CAPITAL PLANET OF A CRUEL GALACTIC EMPIRE ABOVE GROUND IT IS A STRANGE, DESOLATE WORLD – DEVASTATED BY NUCLEAR WARS – WHERE ONLY A FEW POOR OVERLANDERS GRUB A LIVING BUT BENEATH THE SURFACE
HOLD ON WE'RE GOING UNDERGROUND!
TERMIGHT TEEMS WITH LIFE. THE PLANET HAS BEEN HOLLOWED OUT INTO AN AMAZING NETWORK OF TRAVEL TUBES AND UNDERGROUND CITIES!
HEY, YOU OVERLANDERS! SHIFT THAT CRATE! THIS IS THE "SUPER-JUGGERNAUT" LANE!
WEEKEND TRIPPERS! YA MEANT TO DRIVE ON THE CEILING!
SORREEE!
WELCOME TO THE TRAVEL TUBE, FRIENDS! THE MOST ADVANCED ROAD SYSTEM IN THE GALAXY!
CAN'T WE GO BACK, MABELINE? I-I'M JUST A SIMPLE, OLD-FASHIONED OVERLANDER! I DON'T UNDERSTAND THIS NEW-FANGLED TRAVEL TUBE!
DON'T SHOW YER IGNORANCE, ELMER! WE'RE GOING TO VISIT OUR DAUGHTER DOWN IN NECROPOLIS! TAKE HER SOME OF MA HOME-MADE SYNTH-COOKIES!
AND NOW, FRIENDS, IF YOU CAN HEAR ME ABOVE THE GENTLE THUNDER OF THE JUGGERNAUTS, IT'S TRAFFIC NEWS TIME!
ELMER! GET THE MAP OUT! HURRY!
Y-YES, MABELINE
GULP!
THERE'S BEEN ANOTHER MAJOR ROAD ACCIDENT NEAR THE JUNCTION OF "INQUEST ALLEY" WITH "RIGOR MORTIS ROUNDABOUT"...
DRIVERS HEADING FOR NECROPOLIS SHOULD TAKE AN ALTERNATIVE ROUTE DOWN "AUTOPSY UNDERPASS" – REFERENCE
ELMER, ELMER! CAN YOU FIND IT ON THE MAP?
I-I THINK SO MABELINE

The M25 at rush hour has got nothing on this...


NEMESIS!!
BRIMSTONE

Arrow-nosed, cloven-hoofed antihero Nemesis.


NOW IT'S YOUR TURN, DEVIANT!

NEMESIS THE WARLOCK
DEVIANT EDITION

WRITER: Pat Mills
ARTISTS: Kevin O'Neill, Jesús Redondo
OUT: Now
★★★★

Here he comes, scything through space in his arrow-shaped ship to save all deviants from the evil Terminators, the mighty Nemesis the Warlock! And how mighty he was, *2000 AD*'s interstellar freedom fighter with the strange face and the stranger stories.

Crashing into Tharg's pages in 1980, Nemesis began life as the unseen antagonist in *The Terror Tube*, a one-shot thrown together by Pat Mills and Kevin O'Neill. It proved popular, and a legend was born right on the pages of the *Prog* as Mills and O'Neill developed *Nemesis* into a darkly gothic space fantasy quite unlike anything else.

It's that early development that we see in this *Deviant Edition*, which collects the first three books of Nemesis's story as it appeared in the pages of *Eagle*, a shortlived anthology that repackaged *2000 AD* stories for the American market. The key upshot of reprinting the *Eagle* versions is, of course, colour, and Rebellion has done some fine work in making the artwork pop right off the page.

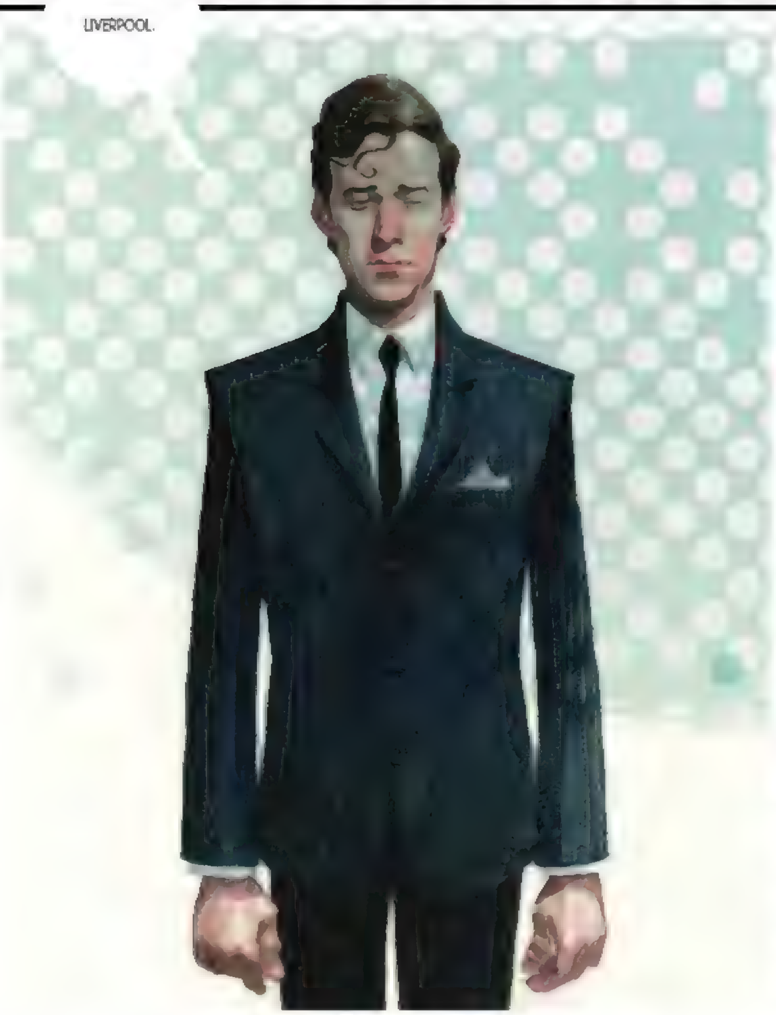
The vivid colouring isn't the only bonus lurking in these pages though: also included are all the original covers of the *Eagle* reprints (and there are some right crackers in there), as well as the long-out-of-print story *The Tomb Of Torquemada*, a beautifully drawn and grisly short that appeared in *Nemesis Poster Prog* #1 in 1994.

No matter how familiar you think you are with Nemesis, there's always more fun to be found lurking around the edges. Here, in glorious full colour, Kevin O'Neill's art is given the eyeball-bursting showcase it deserves. Frothing with disgusting and frequently hilarious detail, he creates a future universe that is as beautiful as it is bizarre. Plenty of panels will stop you in your tracks, and the large format and top-notch print quality gives them ample opportunity to grab you by the collar and shake you about a bit.

The story itself, a classic piece of Pat Mills polemic railing against conformity, oppression and fascism via a typically Millsian anti-establishment resistance fighter, gets better and better as the book progresses. By the final pages, you can see how comfortable Mills and O'Neill have become in their twisted future world, a confidence that shines through.

It's fascinating watching Nemesis and Torquemada develop on the page. Torquemada, that finest of villains out to destroy all alien deviants and keep the citizens of Termight under his holy heel, becomes a towering menace before your eyes, and it's a lot of fun.

As the characterisation deepens and the worldbuilding becomes ever more elaborate, leaving the world of Nemesis at the end of the *Deviant Edition* is quite a wrench. This is a lovingly rendered and worthwhile reprint of a *2000 AD* icon, and a reminder of just how great a character Nemesis is. Stick it at the top of your Christmas list, and remember: be pure! Be vigilant! Behave! **Rob Power**



THE FIFTH BEATLE

WRITER: Vivek Tiwary
ARTISTS: Andrew Robinson & Kyle Baker
PUBLISHER: Dark Horse
OUT: 19 November
★★★★★

With the exception of Ho Che Anderson's *King*, biographies are an extremely rare phenomenon in comic book circles, but this impressive graphic novel – spotlighting The Beatles's inspirational but ultimately tragic manager Brian Epstein – takes you on a truly magical mystery tour that begins in the damp, dreary Liverpool of 1961 and eventually climaxes, in a fanfare of brilliant Technicolor, as the psychedelic era is ushered in, in the London of 1967.

Written by Broadway producer Vivek Tiwary (Green Day's *American Idiot*) and mostly illustrated in evocative painted tones by Andrew Robinson – with a brief manic, cartoony interlude from Kyle Baker – *The Fifth Beatle* really captures Epstein's early, dogged determination and his certainty that – in the face of widespread industry indifference – his young charges would go on to become world-beaters. How right he was.

This is an ambitious first foray into comics and Tiwary shows great command of the medium, not cluttering his panels with unnecessary captions and really allowing Robinson's fluid art to breathe.

He sometimes plays fast and loose with the facts – such as with the creation of Epstein's trusted confidante, Moxy, who is actually an amalgam of several real-life individuals – but Tiwary's more concerned with capturing the emotion of the moment than the cold, hard truth and *The Fifth Beatle* concludes with an intriguing sting in its tail that will force you to re-evaluate everything that has gone before. **Stephen Jewell**

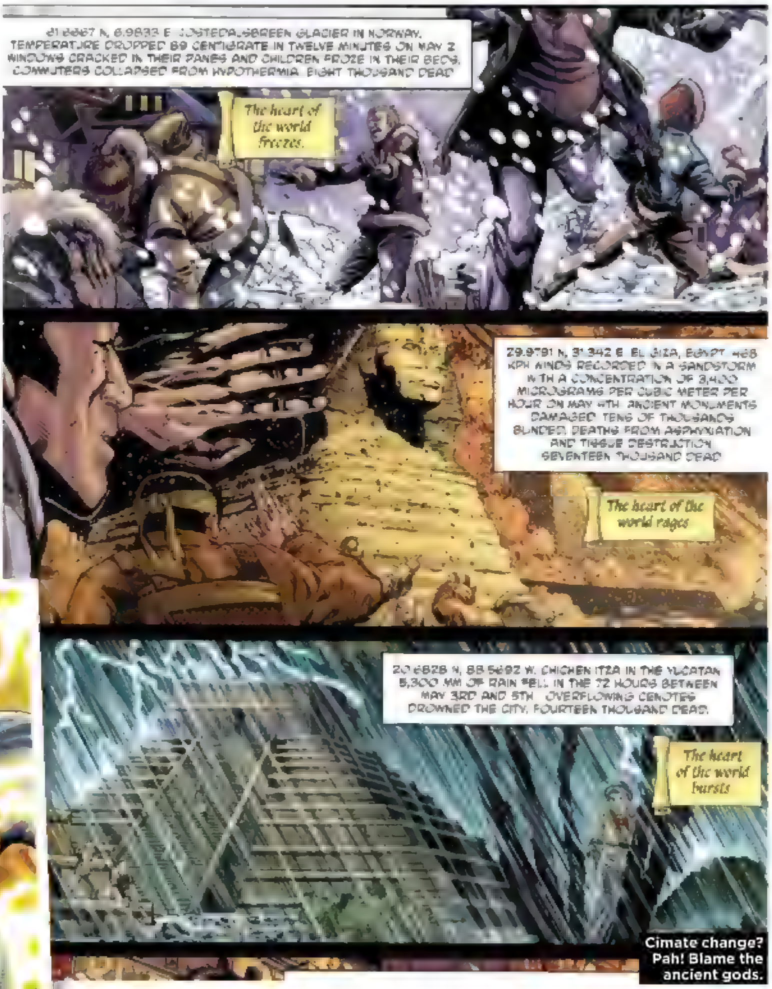
GOD IS DEAD

WRITERS: Jonathan Hickman & Mike Costa
ARTIST: Di Amorim
PUBLISHER: Avatar
OUT: Now
★★★★

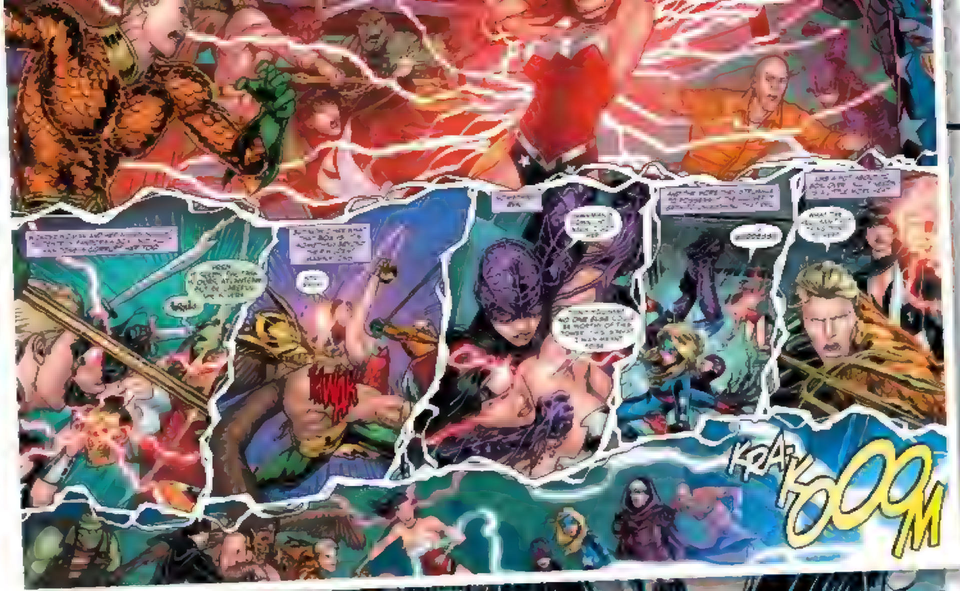
Hickman's oblique storytelling strategies tend to suit his creator-owned material better than they do his work-for-hire writing. His runs on *Fantastic Four* and recently *Avengers* have dialled down the straightforward superhero action in favour of gnomic dialogue and brain-spinning high concept, leaving many readers in raptures and just as many in ruptures. *The Manhattan Projects* and *East Is West*, by contrast, excel with their skewed, loopy bizarreness.

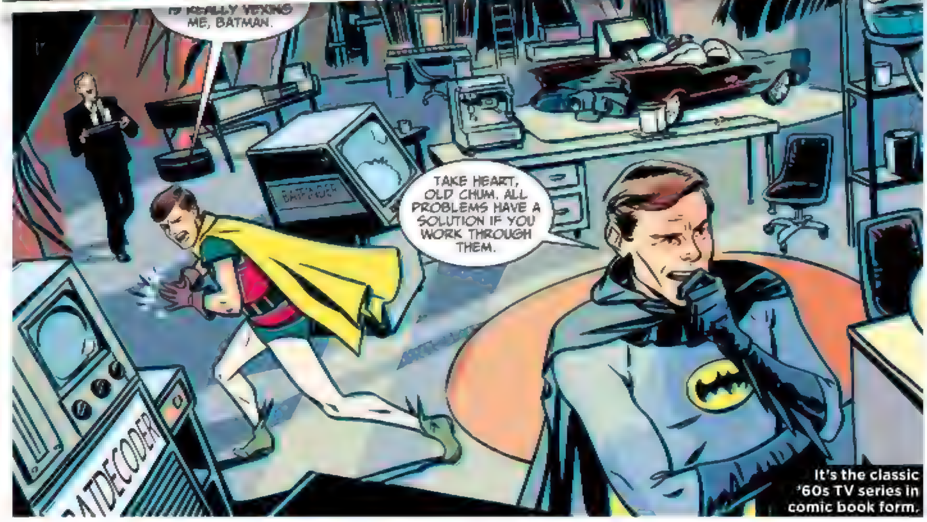
God Is Dead, beneath one of Hickman's classy, designed-within-an-inch-of-its-life covers, opens with a series of natural disasters which herald the return of the ancient gods to earth. As the various pantheons assert their dominance through sheer divine power, demanding subjugation and sacrifice, some mortals gladly acquiesce and bend the knee while others – rebels, rationalists, atheists – gather in secret to plot an overthrow. The first issue ends with Odin calling a conclave of deities with a view to carving up Earth into governable chunks. It's godpunk deluxe, as representatives from each pantheon swagger into Valhalla like themed teams of superheroes.

Brazilian artist Di Amorim goes to town on the look and design of the gods and doesn't shy away from the titillating nudity and gore that seem de rigueur in any Avatar title. A six-issue miniseries, *God Is Dead* promises to be a fun mythological mash-up, badass bastardly deities getting their just desserts at the hands of upstart humans. **James Lovegrove**

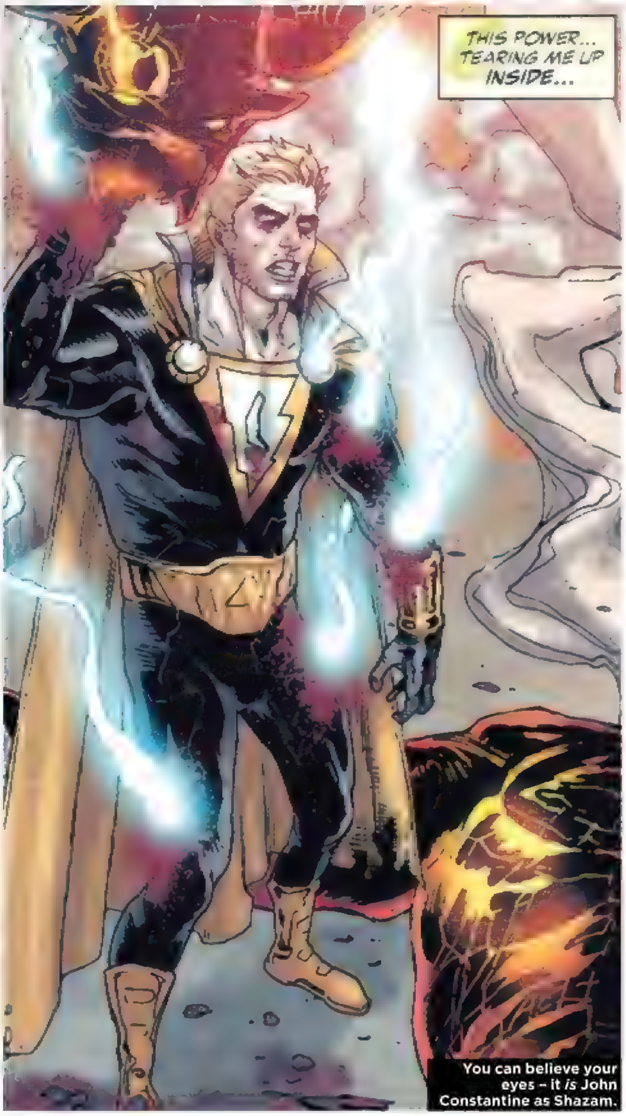

61.6867 N, 6.9833 E JOSTEDALSBREEN GLACIER IN NORWAY. TEMPERATURE DROPPED 69 CENTIGRADE IN TWELVE MINUTES ON MAY 2. WINDOWS CRACKED IN THEIR PANES AND CHILDREN FROZE IN THEIR BEDS. COMMUTERS COLLAPSED FROM HYPOTHERMIA. EIGHT THOUSAND DEAD.
The heart of the world freezes.
29.9791 N, 31.342 E EL GIZA, EGYPT. 468 KPH WINDS RECORDED IN A SANDSTORM WITH A CONCENTRATION OF 3,400 MICROGRAMS PER CUBIC METER PER HOUR ON MAY 4TH. ANCIENT MONUMENTS DAMAGED. TENS OF THOUSANDS BLINDED. DEATHS FROM ASPHYXIATION AND TISSUE DESTRUCTION. SEVENTEEN THOUSAND DEAD.
The heart of the world rages
20.6828 N, 88.5692 W. CHICHEN ITZA IN THE YUCATAN. 5,300 MM OF RAIN FELL IN THE 72 HOURS BETWEEN MAY 3RD AND 5TH. OVERFLOWING CENOTES DROWNED THE CITY. FOURTEEN THOUSAND DEAD.
The heart of the world bursts

Cimate change? Pah! Blame the ancient gods.




IS REALLY VEXING ME, BATMAN.
TAKE HEART, OLD CHUM. ALL PROBLEMS HAVE A SOLUTION IF YOU WORK THROUGH THEM.
BATDECODER

It's the classic '60s TV series in comic book form.


THIS POWER... TEARING ME UP INSIDE...

You can believe your eyes – it *is* John Constantine as Shazam.

All images courtesy of DC Comics

DC ROUND-UP

Trinity War is wearing thin, but '60s nostalgia and hard-as-nails sci-fi make a much better impression

TRINITY WAR
WRITERS: Various
ARTISTS: Various
OUT: Now
★★★

BATMAN '66
WRITER: Jeff Parker
ARTISTS: Jonathan Case, Ty Templeton
OUT: Now
★★★★

TOM STRONG AND THE PLANET OF PERIL
WRITER: Peter Hogan
ARTIST: Chris Sprouse
OUT: Now
★★★★

LARFLEEZE
WRITERS: Keith Giffen, JM DeMatteis
ARTIST: Scott Kolins
OUT: Now
★★★

Trinity War is the big crossover event that's been cycling its way through *Justice League*, *Justice League Of America* and *Justice League Dark*, along with a handful of tie-in titles, predominantly *Constantine* and *Phantom Stranger*.

The core six-part storyline sees Superman succumbing to the magical evil influence that's contained inside Pandora's golden skull-shaped box. He promptly kills Dr Light, frying his head off with a blast of heat vision, and the stage is set for a battle between the big guns of the Justice League and the slightly smaller guns of the JLA.

Further misunderstandings and frame-ups follow, leading to further superhero-on-superhero clashes. Manipulating events from behind the scenes is a mysterious ashen-skinned chap with a cane and a bowler hat, the leader of the Secret Society of Super Villains, and from here we segue straight into the next crossover, *Forever Evil*, in which the baddies take over the DCU.

As these things go, *Trinity War* isn't too bad, but we've already seen groups of superheroes pitted against one another countless times before, notably in Marvel's *Civil War*, and despite the best efforts of top-notch creators – the likes of Geoff Johns, Jeff Lemire, Ivan Reis and Doug Mahnke – a distinct sense of déjà vu hangs over the affair. And it will take a lot of mental Cillit Bang to erase the bizarre image of John Constantine, in issue #5 of his own book, kitted out in spandex and cape after temporarily stealing Shazam's powers. "Trust me," the former Hellblazer says to the demon he's pummelling, "I like this less than you do." But nowhere near as little as we like it.

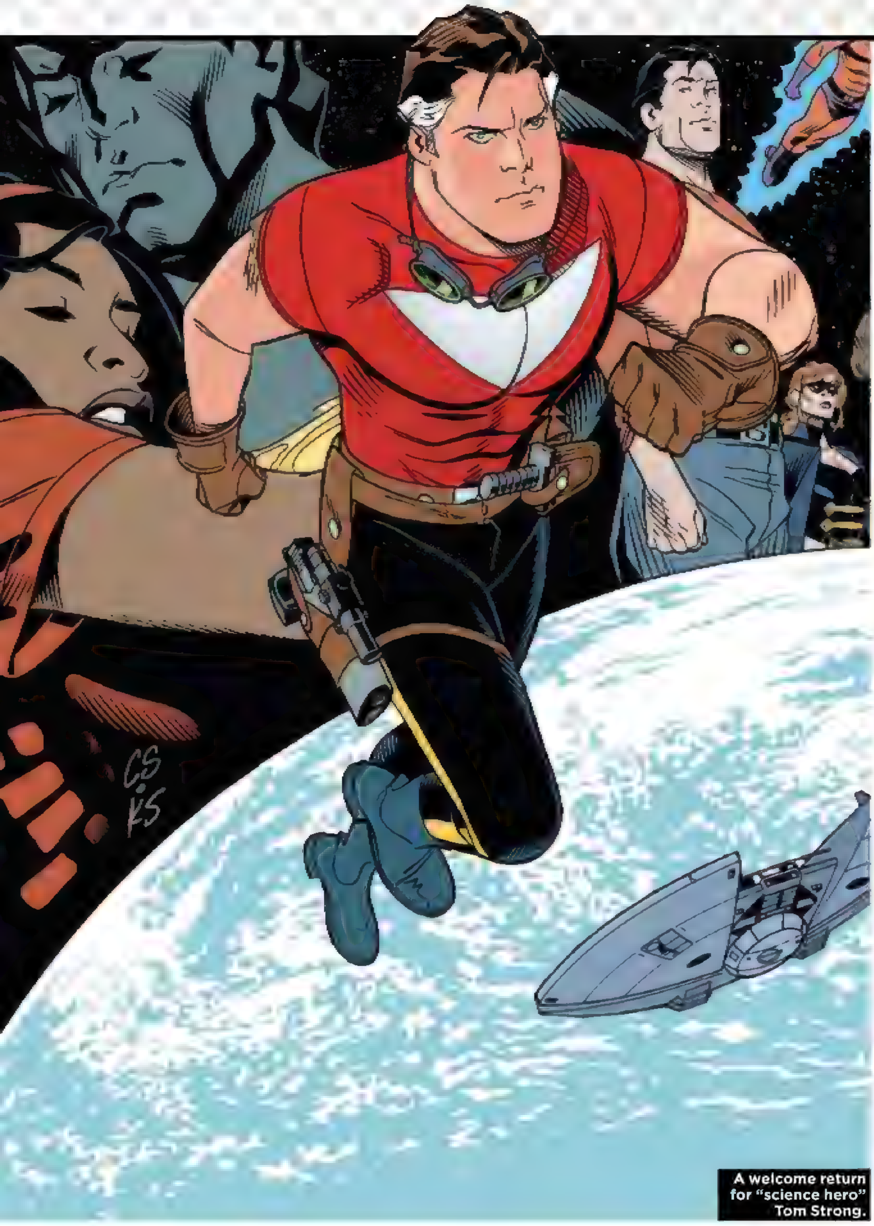
Much more fun, if no more original, is ***Batman '66***, a series paying homage to the swinging-'60s TV show. Jeff Parker's scripts replicate perfectly the campery and buffoonery of the original – all those puns and that daft dialogue delivered deadpan – and the art captures the likenesses of the actors well enough, although Ty Templeton, in #2, does a better job of it than Jonathan Case in #1. Case also makes the strange decision to misregister the colours, shifting the blues slightly out of line with the blacks. This is presumably to convey a trippy, psychedelic vibe, but the result is like looking at a 3D comic without the glasses; it's fairly off-putting.

Mike Allred supplies pitch-perfect covers (a shame he isn't doing any interior art too – this is the sort of project he was born for), and the sound effects and narrative captions are pleasingly authentic. All in all, *Batman '66* is hugely enjoyable, a nostalgic treat for anyone who remembers that faraway time when tubby Adam West and not-as-young-as-he-looks Burt Ward were just about the only live-action screen superheroes we had.

GOING STRONG

It's highly unlikely that we'll see any more *Tom Strong* comics from the pen of his creator Alan Moore, but if someone else is going to step up to the keyboard, it might as well be Peter Hogan. He understands the character and supporting cast, and his two previous *Tom Strong* miniseries were both excellent pulp-fiction science hero adventures.

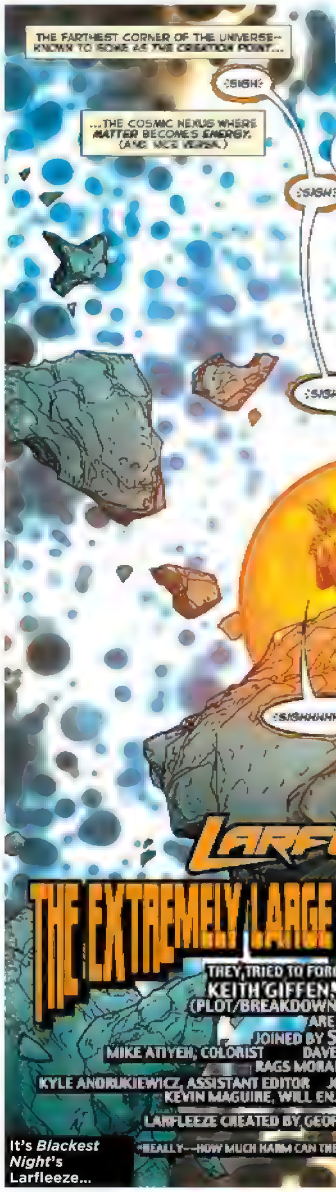
With his new Vertigo title, ***Tom Strong And The Planet Of Peril***, Hogan sends Tom back to Terra Obscura, an alternative duplicate version of Earth, on an urgent mission to save his pregnant daughter Tesla. The unborn baby is displaying heat-generating powers like its father, Val Var



A welcome return for "science hero" Tom Strong.

Tom Strong renders in typicaly clean, simple art.

Larfleeze turns space opera up to eleven.


THE FARTHEST CORNER OF THE UNIVERSE-- KNOWN TO SOME AS THE CREATION POINT...
::SIGH::
...THE COSMIC NEXUS WHERE MATTER BECOMES ENERGY. (AND VICE VERSA.)
::SIGH::
REDUCE US TO AN UNCONSCIOUS MASS OF SUBATOMIC PARTICLES.
::SIGHHHHH::
ADD TO THAT THE FACT THAT YOUR POWER RING IS FIFTEEN MINUTES FROM RUNNING DOWN AND--
::SIGHHHHHHHHHHH::
AND YOU'RE NOT LISTENING TO ME--ARE YOU?
LARFLEEZE IN
THE EXTREMELY LARGE DOG ON THE EDGE OF FOREVER!
THEY TRIED TO FORCE THEM INTO RETIREMENT, BUT--
KEITH GIFFEN (PLOT/BREAKDOWNS) and J.M. DEMATTEIS (SCRIPT)
"ARE TOGETHER AGAIN"
JOINED BY SCOTT KOLINS, ARTIST
MIKE ATIYEH, COLORIST DAVE SHARPE, LETTERER HOWARD PORTER, COVER
RAGS MORALES, RELIC VARIANT COVER
KYLE ANDRUKIEWICZ, ASSISTANT EDITOR JOEY CAVALIERI, WORRIED MATT IDELSON, GROUP EDITOR
KEVIN MAGUIRE, WILL ENJOY SEEING HIS NAME IN THESE CREDITS
LARFLEEZE CREATED BY GEOFF JOHNS, ETHAN VAN SCIVER and IVAN REIS
*REALLY--HOW MUCH HARM CAN THEY POSSIBLY DO ON A COMIC BOOK CALLED LARFLEEZE?

It's *Blackest Night*'s Larfleeze...

> **"If anyone other then Moore is going to take on *Tom Strong*, it might as well be Hogan"**

Garm – who belongs to a volcanically high-temperatured subterranean race of "fire devils" first encountered in issue #8 of the original ABC Comics series – and this is endangering Tesla's life. Tom and Val fly off across the breadth of the Milky Way in order to procure some Alosun, the substance which gives Tom's Terra Obscura counterpart Dr Tom Strange his indestructibility and could therefore save mother and child.

It's a treat to see Chris Sprouse pencilling the strip, inked as sympathetically as ever by Karl Story. Their clean, imposing art is indelibly associated with *Tom Strong*. No one else can quite convey his square-jawed earnestness and dignity.

Similarly space-operatic – and perhaps even more lighthearted – is ***Larfleeze***. It's the first solo outing for the doglike, extravagantly-fanged wielder of the Orange Lantern ring (which is powered by the emotion of greed). Issue #1 serves as a Secret Origin, with Larfleeze narrating his backstory to his butler Stargrave: his birth into a large, cruel family on the planet Sh'pilkuzz, his enslavement by the Lakadakian race, his subsequent escape from servitude, and his discovery of the Orange Light.

The set-up affords co-writers Keith Giffen and JM DeMatteis plenty of opportunity to indulge in the same bwah-hah-hah slapstick comedy and bathos that made their late-'80s *Justice League* run such a gem. Stargrave is the perfect comic foil, undercutting his master's covetousness, pomposity and self-delusion with a dry, droll wit. Scott Kolins's cartoony art, over Giffen's breakdowns, is beautifully enhanced by Mike Atiyeh's painterly colouring. You can file this one under Guilty Pleasures. **James Lovegrove**

HICKMAN·OPEÑA·WEAVER·PONSOR
INFINITY
PART THREE OF SIX
HICKMAN·CHEUNG·MORALES·PONSOR
INFINITY
PART ONE OF SIX
VARIANT MARVEL EDITION

Black Bolt screams; Attilan crumbles.

Big bad Thanos is wreaking all sorts of havoc.

MARVEL ROUND-UP

Marvel goes all *Lord Of The Rings* as *Infinity* paves the way for *Inhumanity*...

INFINITY

WRITER: Jonathan Hickman
ARTISTS: Jimmy Cheung, Jerome Opena & Dustin Weaver
OUT: Now
★★★★

AVENGERS

WRITER: Jonathan Hickman
ARTIST: Leinil Yu
OUT: Now
★★★★

NEW AVENGERS

WRITER: Jonathan Hickman
ARTIST: Mike Deodato
OUT: Now
★★★★

MIGHTY AVENGERS

WRITER: Al Ewing
ARTIST: Greg Land
OUT: Now
★★★★

INFINITY: THE HUNT

WRITER: Matt Kindt
ARTIST: Steven Sanders
OUT: Now
★★

CAPTAIN MARVEL

WRITERS: Kelly Sue DeConnick & Jen Van Meter
ARTIST: Patrick Oliffe
OUT: Now
★★★

After *Age Of Ultron*'s post-apocalyptic smackdowns and time-twisting conundrums, the last thing that even the most hardened of Marvelites is surely yearning for is yet another blockbuster crossover. But dense and oblique where its Brian Michael Bendis-scripted predecessor was sparse and bombastic, Jonathan Hickman's ***Infinity*** really is that rarest of comics: an event book that truly feels like an epic turning point in the Marvel Universe and not just a tenuously-linked and increasingly confusing sequence of superhuman slugfests.

Hickman might have cut his teeth at the House of Ideas in 2008, co-writing *Secret Warriors* with Bendis, but he is a considerably subtler and more nuanced author than the man he succeeded on the twin flagship Avengers titles almost 12 months ago. Carefully building his labyrinthine storylines with craft and precision, he is perhaps the only one of his fellow leading scribes to truly deserve that now redundant sobriquet of Marvel Architect.

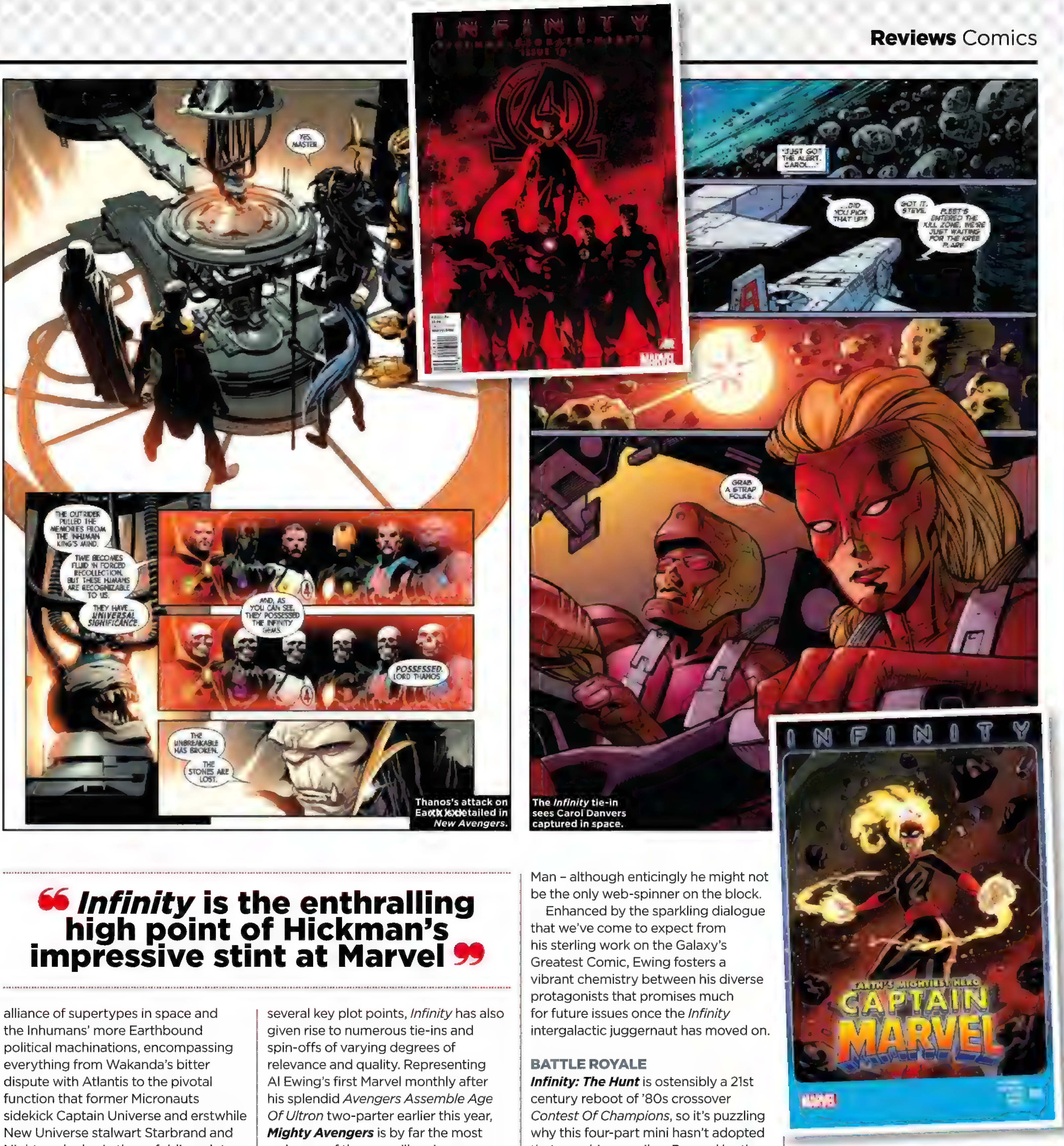
With its artfully-designed title pages and chapter breaks, *Infinity* stands alongside his creator-owned Image titles *East Meets West* and *Manhattan Projects* as just another excellent Jonathan Hickman book. In fact, with its biblical overtones, *Infinity* boasts a similar mindset to Hickman's recent Mike Costa co-written Avatar series *God Is Dead*, which depicts the destructive consequences of the members of various mythic deities descending upon a disbelieving Earth. As the ever-shifty Maximus points out, Thanos evokes the ominous spirit of, "Herod with the Christ in the human holy books," when he makes Black Bolt a chilling offer that he has no choice but to refuse.

Infinity lays the groundwork for December's *Inhumanity* – which will apparently transform the Inhumans into a *Game Of Thrones*-esque high fantasy-flavoured adventure – and there's actually an intriguing *Lord Of The Rings*-style quality to its vast, Byzantine canvas, with Thanos taking on the sinister role of Sauron while his insidious lieutenant Corvus Glaive plays an even more malevolent Saruman.

Chronicled not just in *Infinity* itself but also in ***Avengers*** and ***New Avengers***, the recap pages and cast lists at the front of each issue are handy crib sheets for even regular readers.

Hickman splits the narrative between a spectacular space battle involving an increasingly beleaguered galactic

BUT THERE WAS NO HEALING OR PLANNING BECAUSE THERE WAS NO HIDING.


INFINITY
MARVEL
YES, MASTER.
THE OUTRIDER PULLED THE MEMORIES FROM THE INHUMAN KING'S MIND.
TIME BECOMES FLUID IN FORCED RECOLLECTION, BUT THESE HUMANS ARE RECOGNIZABLE TO US.
THEY HAVE... UNIVERSAL SIGNIFICANCE.
AND, AS YOU CAN SEE, THEY POSSESSED THE INFINITY GEMS.
POSSESSED, LORD THANOS.
THE UNBREAKABLE HAS BROKEN.
THE STONES ARE LOST.
JUST GOT THE ALERT, CAROL...
...DID YOU PICK THAT UP?
GOT IT, STEVE.
FLEET'S ENTERED THE KILL ZONE. WE'RE JUST WAITING FOR THE KREE FLARE.
GRAB A STRAP, FOLKS.
INFINITY
EARTH'S MIGHTIEST HERO
CAPTAIN MARVEL
MARVEL

Thanos's attack on Earth is detailed in *New Avengers*.

The *Infinity* tie-in sees Carol Danvers captured in space.

“*Infinity* is the enthralling high point of Hickman's impressive stint at Marvel”

alliance of supertypes in space and the Inhumans' more Earthbound political machinations, encompassing everything from Wakanda's bitter dispute with Atlantis to the pivotal function that former Micronauts sidekick Captain Universe and erstwhile New Universe stalwart Starbrand and Nightmask play in the unfolding plot.

The illustrative styles of the revolving art team – Jimmy Cheung, Jerome Opena and Dustin Weaver – mesh much more seamlessly than the more disparate likes of John Romita Jr and Olivier Coipel did on last year's *X-Men Vs Avengers*, making *Infinity* the enthralling high point of Hickman's impressive five-year stint at Marvel. The only downside is that you can't help but wonder where he will go from here.

While the *Avengers* and *New Avengers* issues are bona fide chapters in the central story arc that are essential if you don't want to miss several key plot points, *Infinity* has also given rise to numerous tie-ins and spin-offs of varying degrees of relevance and quality. Representing Al Ewing's first Marvel monthly after his splendid *Avengers Assemble Age Of Ultron* two-parter earlier this year, ***Mighty Avengers*** is by far the most welcome of these ancillary issues.

Basically using the main Avengers' absence from Earth as an excuse to come together, the events of *Infinity* and the ominous arrival of Thanos cohort Proxima Midnight in downtown New York simply provide a convenient backdrop for the latest incarnation of this offshoot of Marvel's premiere superteam to come together.

Luke Cage – obliged to put aside *Heroes For Hire*'s mercenary demands – heads up a motley band that also includes White Tiger, Power Man, Monica “Spectrum” Rambeau and an endearingly egotistical Superior Spider-Man – although enticingly he might not be the only web-spinner on the block.

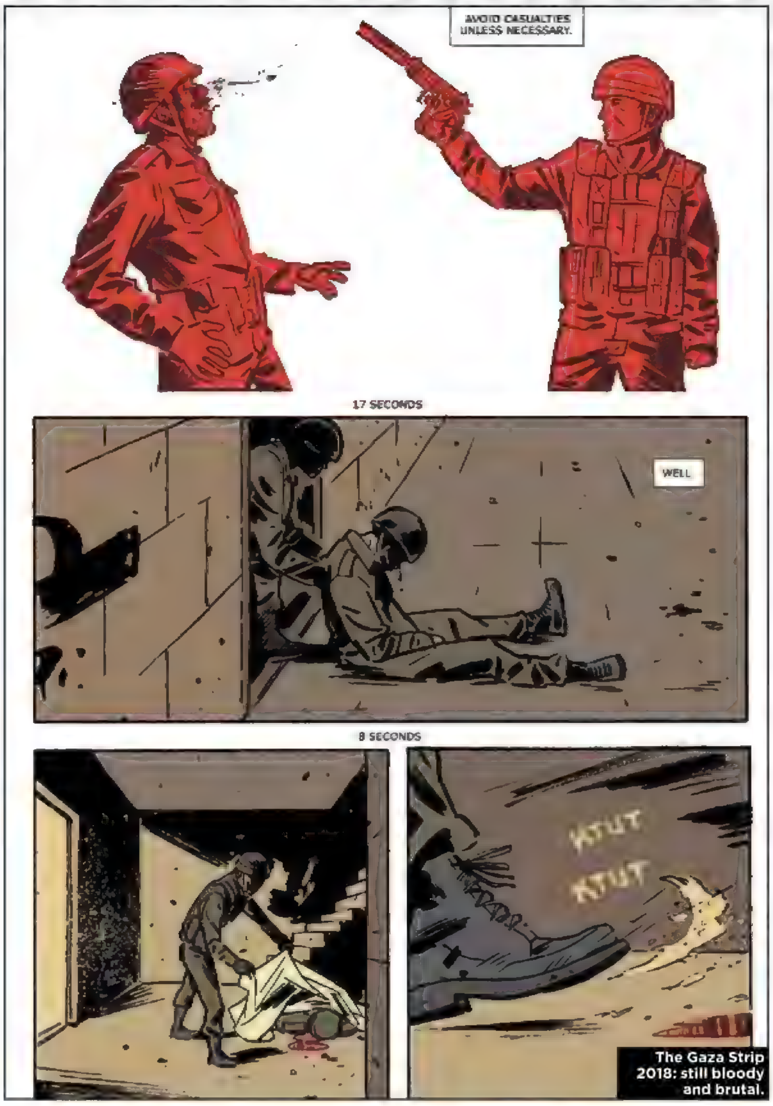
Enhanced by the sparkling dialogue that we've come to expect from his sterling work on the Galaxy's Greatest Comic, Ewing fosters a vibrant chemistry between his diverse protagonists that promises much for future issues once the *Infinity* intergalactic juggernaut has moved on.

BATTLE ROYALE

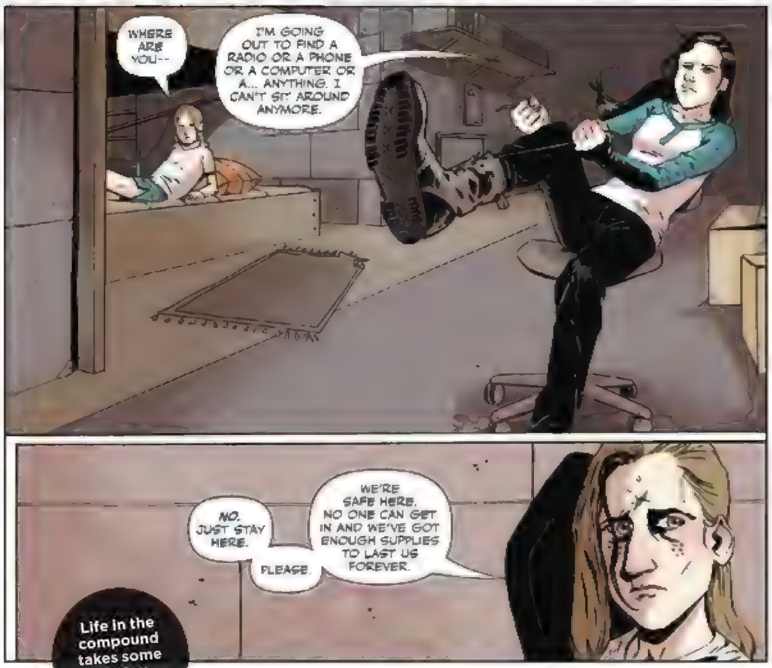
Infinity: The Hunt is ostensibly a 21st century reboot of '80s crossover *Contest Of Champions*, so it's puzzling why this four-part mini hasn't adopted that punchier moniker. Penned by the currently ubiquitous Matt Kindt, the *Mind Mgmt* creator disappointingly spends the bulk of the first issue setting up a *Hunger Games*-esque contest between the Marvel Universe's various superhero training institute, before the threat of *Infinity* finally arrives in the last few pages, albeit to devastating effect. However, Steven Sanders's early double-page splash cut-away map of the Avengers Academy's Californian headquarters is a neat touch.

With all the talk of the need for a Marvel female superhero to take centre stage on the big screen, Carol Danvers is a prime candidate, especially after her recent promotion to Captain Marvel. Tying her solo title inexorably into *Infinity*, with some scenes recreated from differing perspectives, is an obvious attempt to boost ***Captain Marvel***'s circulation.

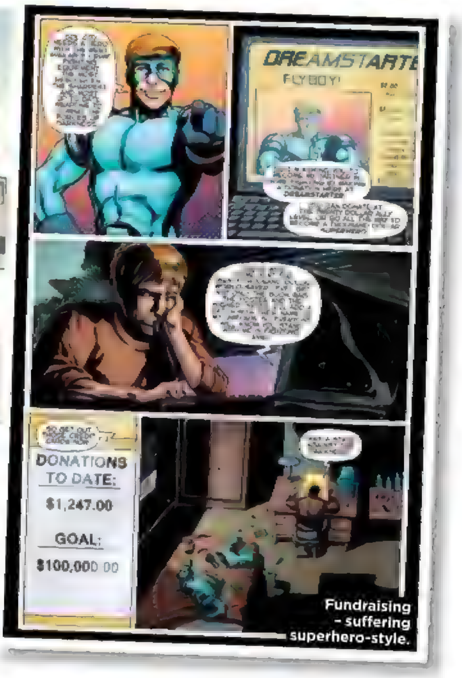
With Jan Van Meter joining resident scripter Kelly Sue DeConnick, “Kiss Goodbye Today” deftly highlights the historic depth of Carol's character with the return of her Binary persona, although few significant developments are added to *Infinity*'s seemingly endless tapestry. **Stephen Jewell**


AVOID CASUALTIES UNLESS NECESSARY.
17 SECONDS
WELL
8 SECONDS
KTUT
KTUT

The Gaza Strip 2018: still bloody and brutal.


WHERE ARE YOU--
I'M GOING OUT TO FIND A RADIO OR A PHONE OR A COMPUTER OR A... ANYTHING. I CAN'T SIT AROUND ANYMORE.
NO. JUST STAY HERE.
PLEASE.
WE'RE SAFE HERE. NO ONE CAN GET IN AND WE'VE GOT ENOUGH SUPPLIES TO LAST US FOREVER.

Life in the compound takes some getting used to.


DREAMSTARTE
FLYBOY!
DONATIONS TO DATE:
$1,247.00
GOAL:
$100,000.00

Fundraising – suffering superhero-style.

IMAGE ROUND-UP

And so it continues, Image's steady stream of classy new comics that always intrigue and rarely fail to surprise

ZERO
WRITER: Ales Kot
ARTIST: Michael Walsh
★★★★½

SHELTERED
WRITER: Ed Brisson
ARTIST: Johnnie Christmas
★★★★

SIDEKICK
WRITER: J Michael Straczynski
ARTIST: Tom Mandrake
★★½

REALITY CHECK
WRITER: Glen Brunswick
ARTIST: Viktor Bogdanovic
★★

BORN TO LOSE: BURN THE ORPHANAGE
WRITERS: Sina Grace & Daniel Freedman
ARTIST: Sina Grace
★★★

We've talked about the current incarnation of Image and its strength-in-depth before, but every month seems to bring a slew of new titles, each as solid as the last. Of recent launches, two particularly stand out: brutal plucked-from-the-headlines near-future super-spy drama *Zero*, and surprising survival horror *Sheltered*.

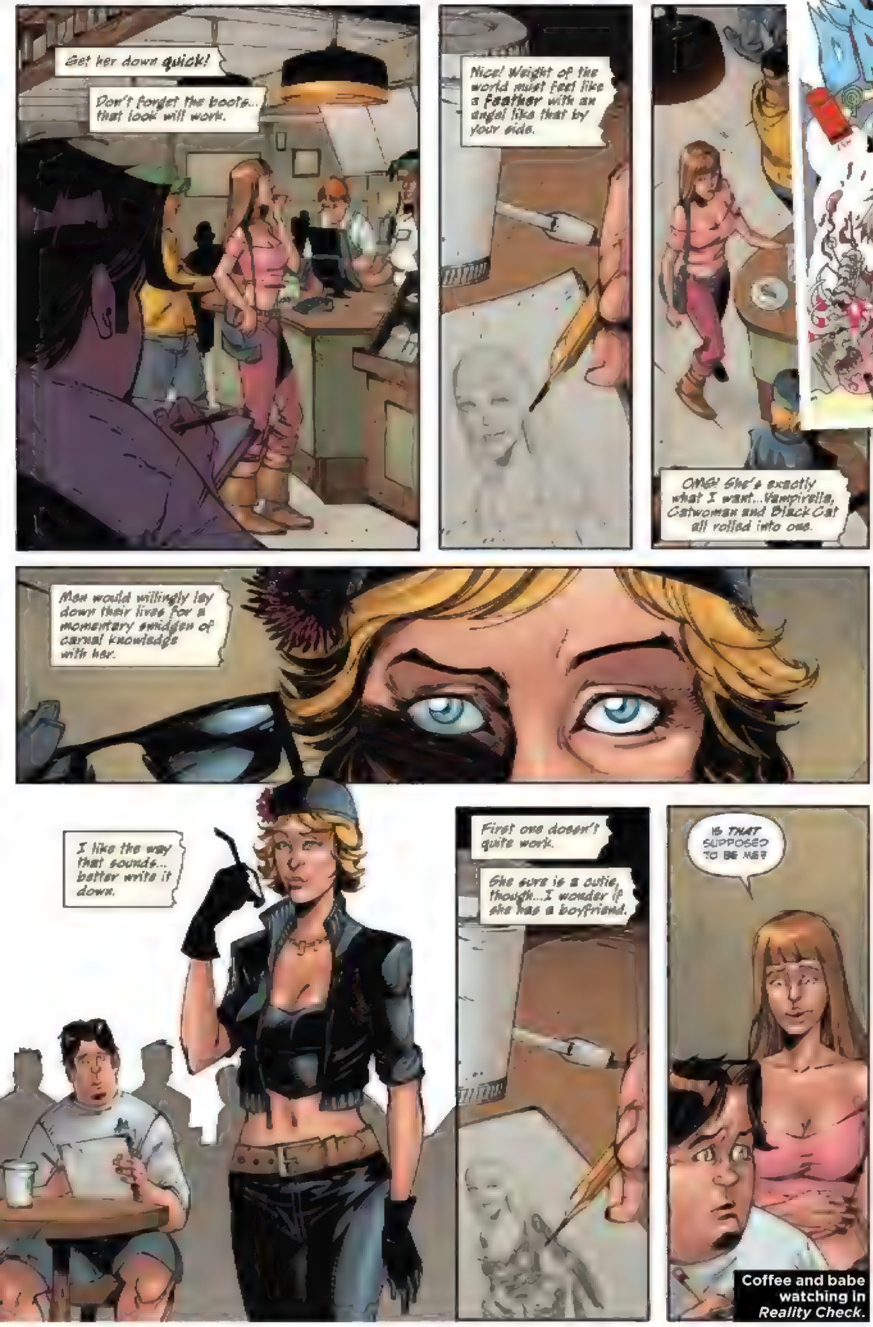
Zero, from intriguing new writer Ales Kot and artist Michael Walsh, is set on the Gaza Strip in 2018 and features a hyper-efficient agent taking out duelling Israeli and Hamas bio-modified super-soldiers, both built using stolen tech. The story fair rattles along, uncompromising and compelling, Walsh bringing a version of the thick-lined, ultra-realistic Alex Toth-esque art style used so effectively by David Mazzucchelli on '80s projects like *Batman: Year One*, and recently appropriated by Spanish artist David Aja for his well-received run on *Hawkeye*. Using striking colours – the Gaza sequences in sand tones, blue-grey for London interludes – and an intriguing mix of page layouts (an 11-panel grid here, a sea of white space with two images floating on it there), Walsh turns in one of the year's best-looking issues. Kot is equally accomplished, teasing us with info, setting up conflicts, but keeping the action relentless throughout.

Future issues will apparently tell of further standalone missions for this amoral and driven agent, Edward Zero, all illustrated by a different artist – it's anyone's guess what we're going to get each time.

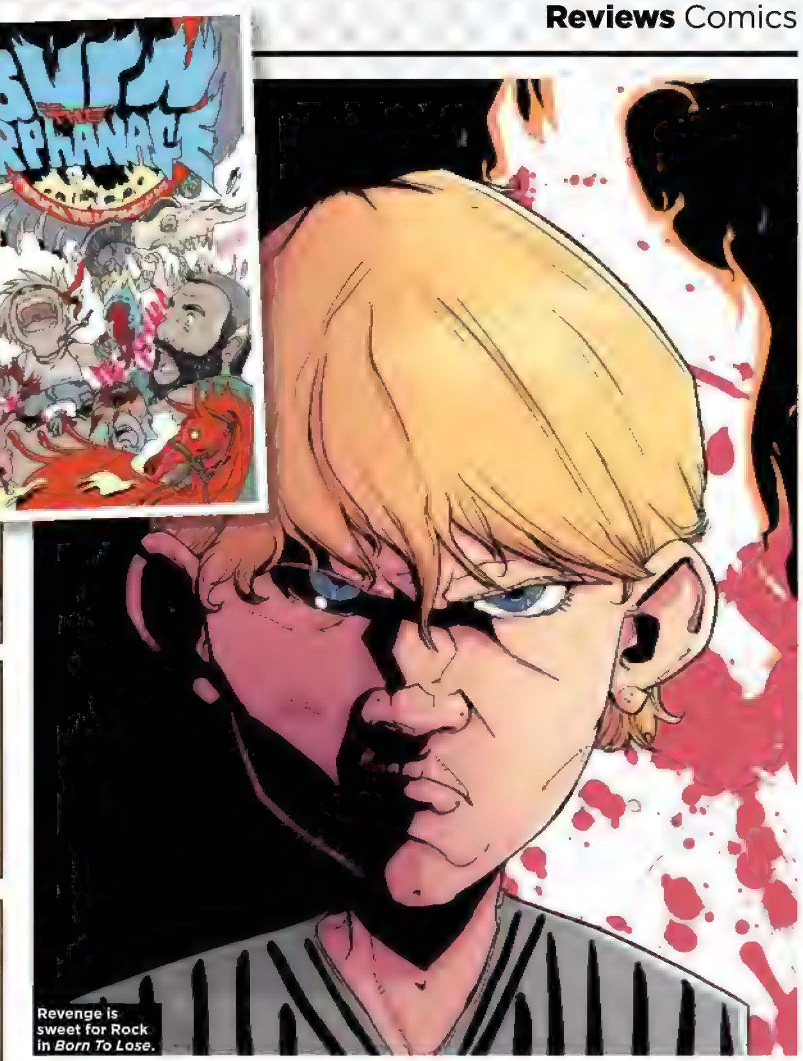
Very different, but just as good, is ***Sheltered***, a tense, claustrophobic *Lord Of The Flies*-style drama from writer Ed Brisson and artist Johnnie Christmas – not a well known team as yet, but the two did collaborate on one of Brisson's *Murder Book* volumes of short crime stories.

We're in a snowy, rural survivalist enclave called Safe Haven, run by "preppers" of varying degrees of loopiness, and new, reluctant teenage arrival Victoria – black clad and city cynical – doesn't like it much. And she's going to like it a whole let less when the plans of charismatic school-age cock-of-the-walk Lucas and his buddies swing into play.

There are no zombies here, not even a conventional apocalypse, but this tale has much of the same feel


Get her down **quick!**
Don't forget the boots... that look will work.
Nice! Weight of the world must feel like a **feather** with an angel like that by your side.
OMG! She's exactly what I want...Vampirella, Catwoman and Black Cat all rolled into one.
Men would willingly lay down their lives for a momentary smidgen of carnal knowledge with her.
I like the way that sounds... better write it down.
First one doesn't quite work.
She sure is a cutie, though...I wonder if she has a boyfriend.
IS THAT SUPPOSED TO BE ME?

Coffee and babe watching in *Reality Check.*


Burn The Orphanage

Revenge is sweet for Rock in *Born To Lose.*

as *The Walking Dead*, with razor wire and hunting rifles and plaid shirts and unfortunate twisted ankles while running through the woods. Christmas uses solid blacks and thin lines – think a grittier Tim Sale – to great effect, while Brisson knows a little bit of brutality goes a long way, and is confident enough in his eye-catching concept to keep things moving at pace. It's certainly off to a strong, compelling start.

SUPER FREAKS

The other Image offerings of late haven't quite been at this level, unfortunately, but that's not to say they're bad.

Celebrated writer J Michael Straczynski – of *Babylon 5*, *Spider-Man* and many more – slightly fluffs ***Sidekick***, his latest high-concept release through his Joe's Comics imprint. The sorry tale of a generic superhero teen buddy called Flyboy – crime-fighting chum of the adult hero Red Cowl, now fallen on hard times following the Kennedy-like assassination of his mentor at a parade – is lumbered with uninteresting, unsympathetic characters and poorly handled shocks and bad taste; it's Garth Ennis's *The Boys* or *The Pro* without the wit, heart or vim.

Both heroes are hopelessly, tediously generic in both conception and artist Tom Mandrake's realisation; the now adult Flyboy's drunken bitching about his lot and sad blow jobs behind the bins from overweight streetwalkers are depressingly formulaic expressions of ennui; and the core idea that a whole city can simultaneously laugh at and be bored by a guy that a) once saved all of their lives from a bomb, and b) can still *fly*, seems laughable. It just wouldn't be that way.

At his best, JMS is an excellent comic book writer with strong core ideas and a good grasp of the craft, but there's a cynicism to his work that feels like it might tip it over into the unpleasant and annoying at any time – *Sidekick* is not a boring read, but it's currently teetering right on the edge of becoming a crass one.

Also slightly disappointing is another superheroes-with-a-twist series, ***Reality Check*** by writer Glen Brunswick (the guy behind *Non-Humans*) and Swiss artist Viktor Bogdanovic. It's a bit like one of those smug movies Hollywood sometimes does about what it's like to make a movie, in that we follow an overweight comic book writer/artist in North Hollywood as he stalks hotties at Starbucks, remembers the total babe he dated at college, and develops a Batman-esque hero called Dark Hour – "the editors at Marvel and DC are constantly emailing to check my availability," he complains, "but they never offer me any work."

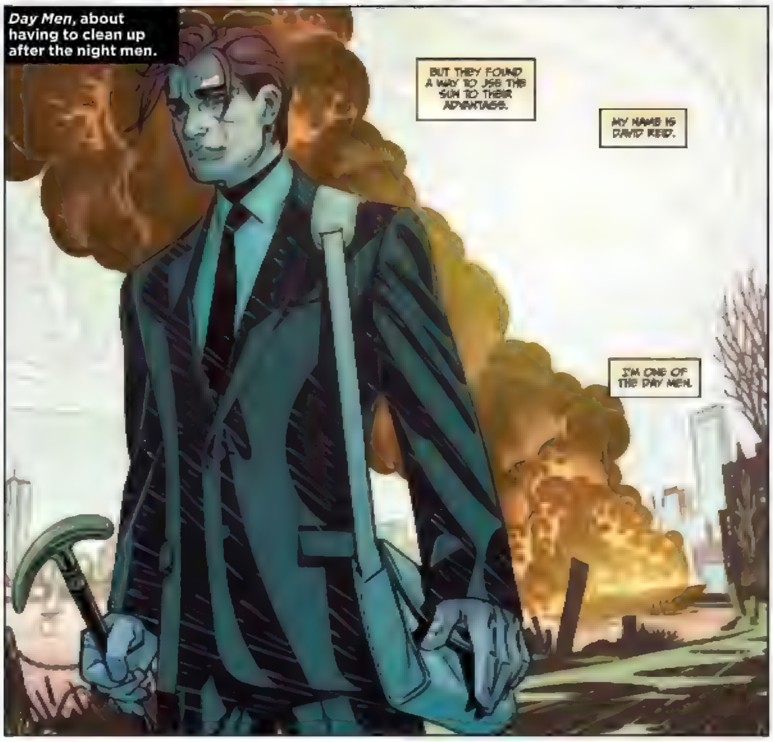
> **❝ In the end, he kicks the guy's head off in an exuberant double-page splash ❞**

Except it's hard to see why: it isn't unpublishable arty fare he's slaving over, but as-generic-as-it-gets superheroes. And as soon as he offers his creation to a parody of Boom! Studios they leap on board with a contract and everything, and immediately the movie studios are ringing off the hook with offers.

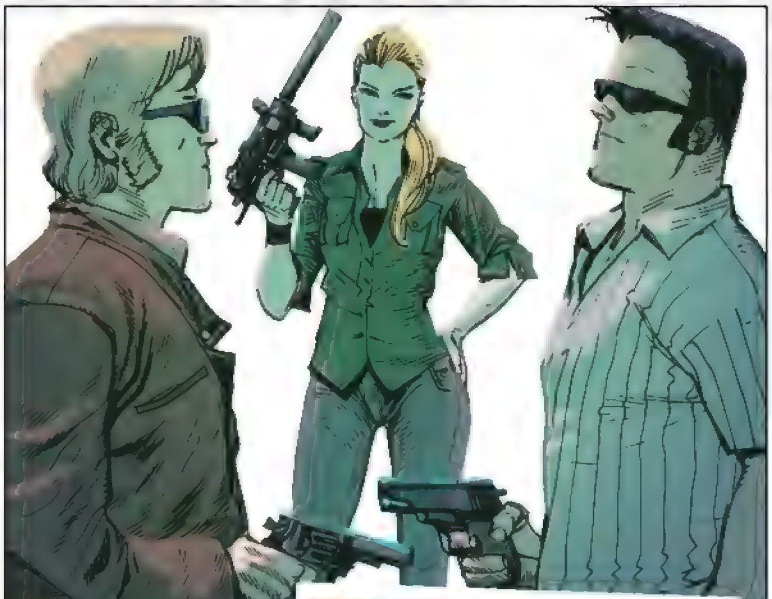
It's difficult to feel sorry for this little shit, basically, and when he suddenly forgets the entire *Dark Hour* story, then meets his own creation in the flesh – "you must be aware that I no longer reside inside your head" – it seems an arbitrary twist. The story's perfectly well paced and the art's fine – I just didn't engage with it at all.

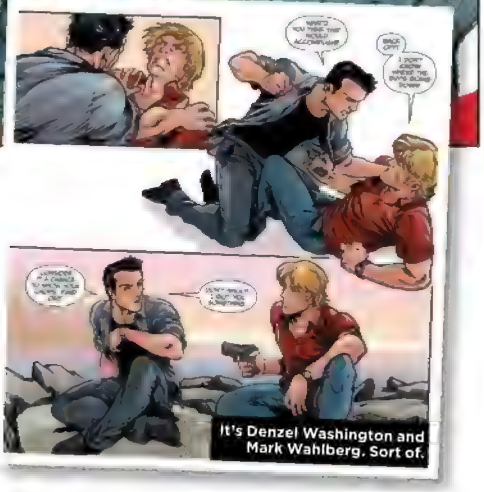
Considerably more fun is the loosely defined ***Born To Lose*** series, three tales inspired by videogames – the first, *Burn The Orphanage*, stars a guy who looks like Ken from *Street Fighter* as he and two pals (a hulking gay chap with a heart transplant "from an actual bear" and a hot chick with a great kick attack) battle their way past assorted cannon fodder and end-of-level bosses in an attempt at belated revenge on whoever burned down the orphanage where our boy, Rock, grew up. In the end he kicks the guy's head off in an exuberant double-page splash.

It's simple as you like, but there's pace to it and a real sense of glee; utterly inessential, sure, but I was grinning by the end of it. **Matt Bielby**


Day Men, about having to clean up after the night men.

BUT THEY FOUND A WAY TO USE THE SUN TO THEIR ADVANTAGE.
MY NAME IS DAVID REID.
I'M ONE OF THE DAY MEN.


The cunningly-titled *3 Guns*. Guess why?


It's Denzel Washington and Mark Wahlberg. Sort of.

BOOM! STUDIOS ROUND-UP

Forget the energetically silly name; Boom! is a company to watch...

DAY MEN
WRITERS: Matt Gagnon & Michael Alan Nelson
ARTIST: Brian Stelfreeze
★★★★½

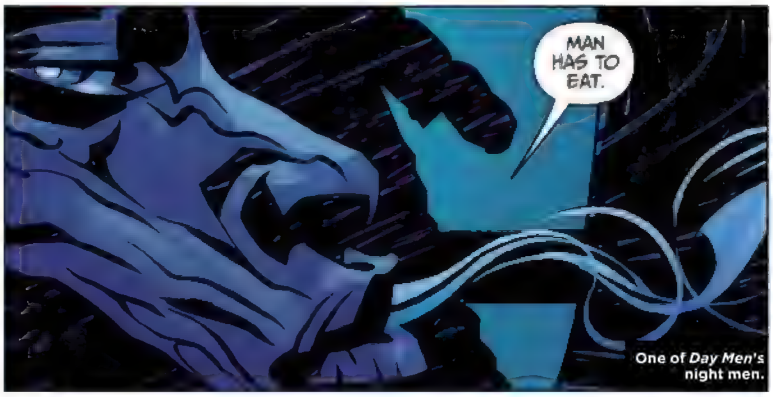
3 GUNS
WRITER: Steven Grant
ARTIST: Emilio Laiso
★★★½

HIT
WRITER: Bryce Carlson
ARTIST: Vanesa R Del Rey
★★★★

ROBOCOP: LAST STAND
WRITERS: Frank Miller & Steven Grant
ARTIST: Korkut Öztekin
★★★

One of the most quietly fascinating little comic book publishers of recent years has been the LA-based Boom! Studios, established by ex-Malibu guys Ross Richie and Andrew Cosby in 2005. They'd left Malibu in the '90s to pursue assorted movie industry projects – Cosby co-created the TV series *Eureka*, Richie worked on the re-launch of Atomeka Press in 2004 – and at first their Boom! output appeared geared towards licenses of existing properties: comics based on *Planet Of The Apes*, *Warhammer* or *Farscape*.

These collabs are still ongoing – a *Sons Of Anarchy* book just launched, and the company's KaBoom! imprint heaves with Pixar, Disney and Muppet stuff – but there's always been an original product strain here too. When Mark Waid was editor-in-chief a few years ago he shepherded titles like *Irredeemable* and *Unknown*, and since 2010 there's even been a literary imprint, Boom! Town. Lately, with Cosby and Waid having moved on and Matt Gagnon the current editor-in-chief, there's been a string of high-concept original projects offering dark takes on fantasy, crime or superhero concepts, from Mike Carey's *Suicide Risk* to Clive Barker's *Next Testament*. Do we have a new Image here?


One of *Day Men's* night men.

MAN HAS TO EAT.

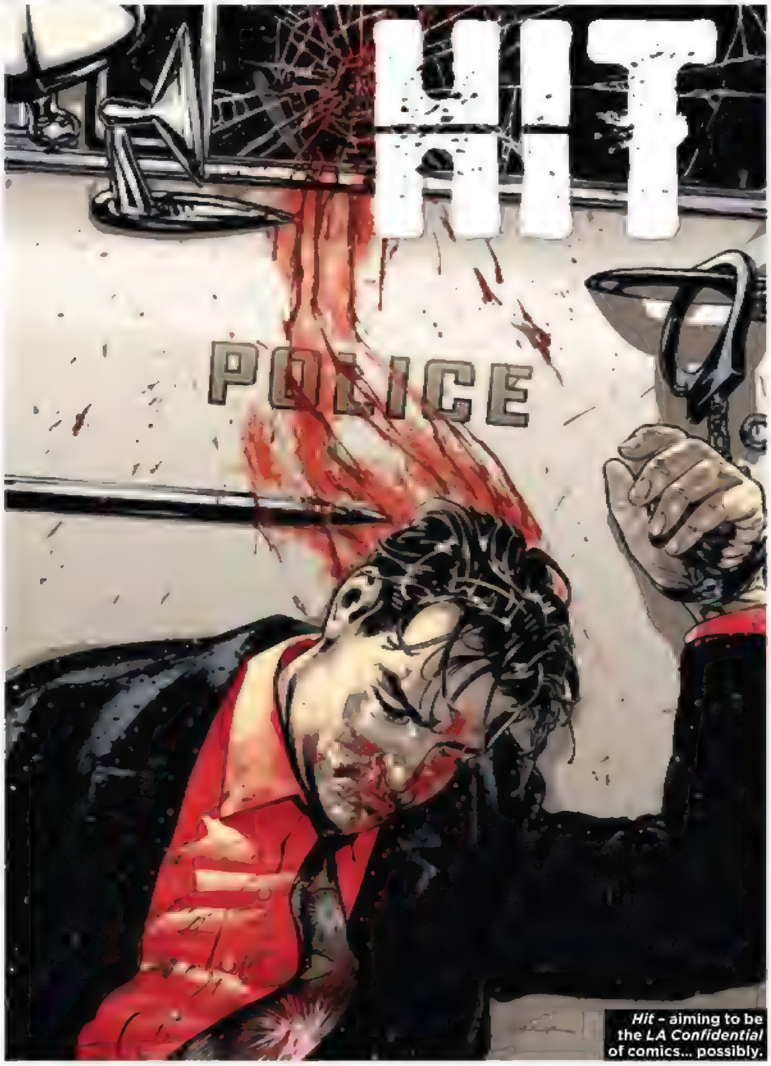
Day Men is written by Gagnon himself, alongside Michael Alan Nelson, and sees the return of the great Brian Stelfreeze – the Gaijin Studios mainstay best known for his *Batman* covers at DC – to regular sequential comics for the first time in years. Stelfreeze isn't a particularly flashy artist, but he is an excellent one – as good at cars and interiors as he is at giving everyone distinct faces and body language – and much of the success of *Day Men* is down to his clear storytelling, clean, detailed line and ability to make talking-head scenes compelling and dynamic. The story is a fairly familiar *Godfather*-with-vampire-families thing, as we follow young "sundog" David Reid – human agent of a powerful vampire clan – as he keeps them safe and cleans up their messes during the daylight hours.

David looks like a twentysomething Jason Blood, carries an effete cane, but is remarkably proficient; at one point he kills two vampires in hand-to-hand combat. Think a cross between John Constantine, Dracula's Renfield, the Corleone's Tom Hagen and The Wolf, Harvey Keitel's "cleaner" character from *Pulp Fiction*, perhaps. Elsewhere, assorted "good" Virgo-clan vampires, "bad" enemy vampires and further human employees of the undead turn up. This is a packed, intriguing first issue; it deserves to be quite a hit.

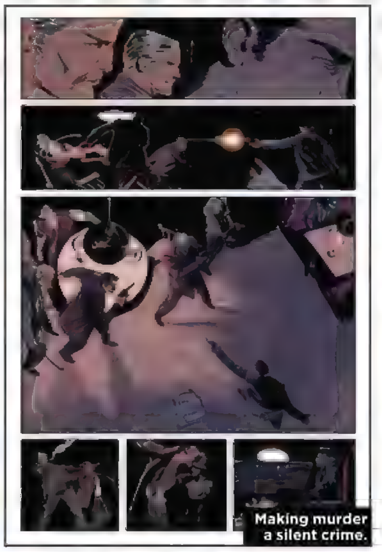
Also very strong are two straight-up crime series – lots of blood, no blood-suckers – that have just kicked off. ***3 Guns*** by Steven Grant and artist Emilio Laiso is a sequel to Grant's *2 Guns* of seven or so years back, an undercover cops shoot-'em-up recently filmed with Denzel Washington and Mark Wahlberg.

Heroes Trench and Steadman – younger and whiter than the movie versions, and currently on the run from drug lords and authorities – find themselves caught up with paramilitary survivalists and the Russian mob; things are further complicated by a glamorous female "third gun", with mutual trust between our three theoretical heroes turning out to be anything but easy.

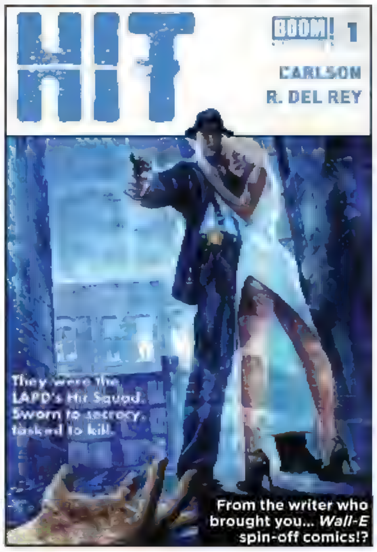
Featuring art from Italian-born relative newcomer Emilio Laiso – in an



Hit - aiming to be the *LA Confidential* of comics... possibly.

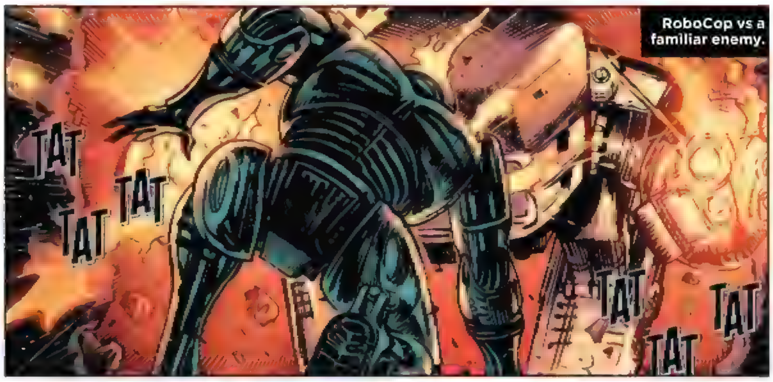


Making murder a silent crime.

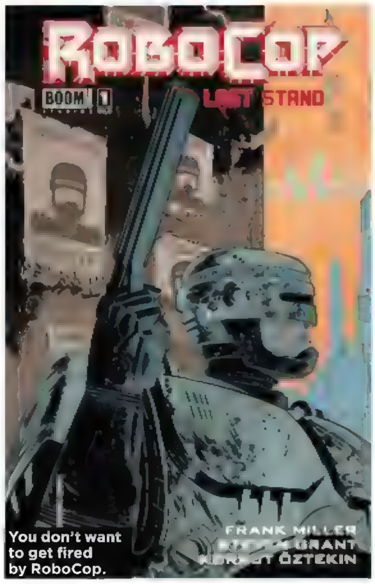

HIT
BOOM! 1
CARLSON
R. DEL REY
They were the LAPD's Hit Squad. Sworn to secrecy, tasked to kill.

From the writer who brought you... *Wall-E* spin-off comics!?

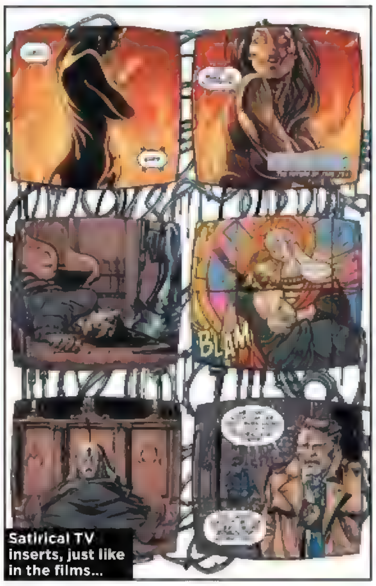
> **“It’s petrifying stuff, heaving with smug, broken men in boxy suits doing terrible things”**



RoboCop vs a familiar enemy.



You don’t want to get fired by RoboCop.



Satirical TV inserts, just like in the films...

open, cartoony style that’s especially good at faces and cars, yet doesn’t flinch from the relative brutality either – *3 Guns* is effective, twisty and intriguing stuff; it’s another one to watch closely, we reckon.

LA STORY

Perhaps even better – certainly grittier – is ***Hit***, a hardboiled 1950s Los Angeles noir in the spirit of *LA Confidential*, or the real life “Gangster Squad” and “Hat Squad” gangs of rogue (but covertly encouraged) police detectives who used particularly violent and proactive methods to put the bite on West Coast organised crime.

It tells of an especially covert Hit Squad within the LAPD, one that’s secret even to most in the department, and which doesn’t try to intimidate gangsters, but simply put them out of the picture, along with any unfortunate witnesses who happen to be standing by. It’s petrifying stuff, heaving with smug, broken men in boxy suits doing terrible things to each other – and all the more compelling since it’s apparently based on real-life events.

Written, unlikely though it may seem, by Boom!’s managing editor Bryce Carlson – best known for his fun *Wall-E* spin-off comics for KaBoom! – and drawn in high-contrast, scratchy vaguely Tim Sale-meets-Paul Pope style by Vanesa R Del Rey, it’s a handsome, intriguing book full of unlikable heroes, violent action and loaded with mood. Del Rey does shadows, sexy dames and period cars and clothing well; amazingly, she makes four key characters – all clean-cut men of similar size in grey suits – look different enough to each other that we can tell them apart.

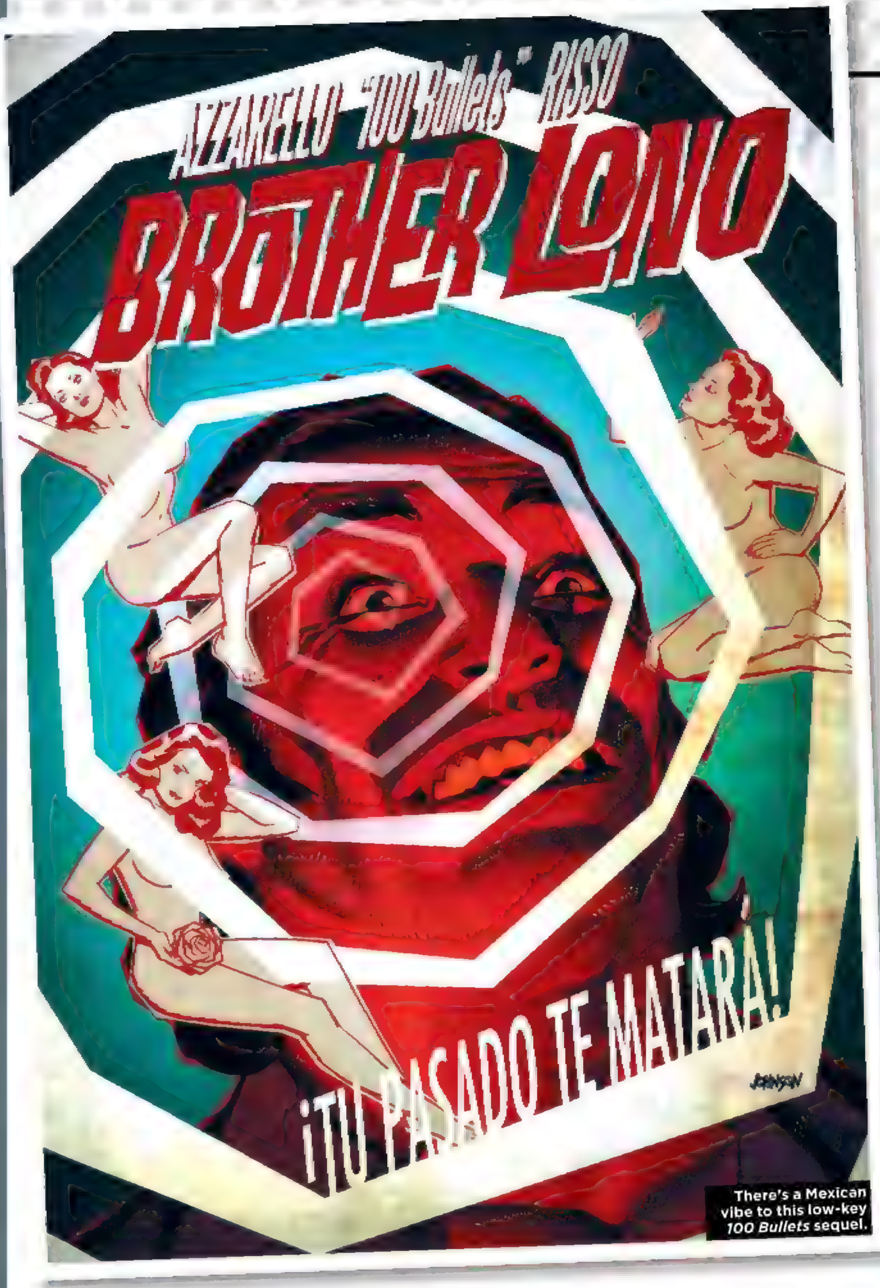
A strong and intriguing story with a very individual, atmospheric look, it’s one to put alongside the likes of Brubaker and Phillips’s *Criminal*.

COP THIS

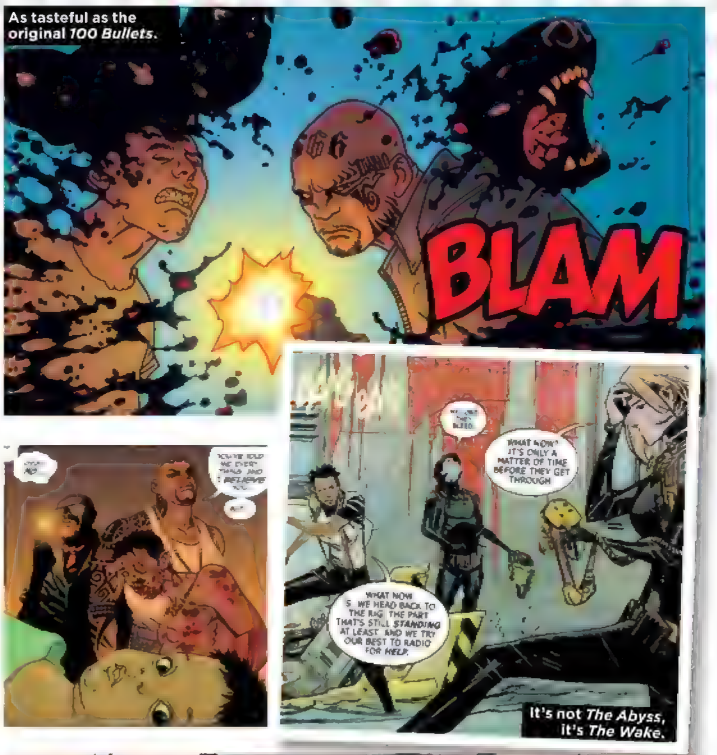
With these other titles so strong, then, ***RoboCop: Last Stand*** – written by Steven Grant from an unmade movie script by Frank Miller and illustrated in scratchy, inky, Darick Robertson style by Korkut Öztekin – comes across as something of a damp squib. In the late ’80s, a Frank Miller at the peak of his powers – following the likes of *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* and *Elektra: Assassin* – wrote a sequel script to the cyborg cop cult hit movie; some of his work (and, indeed, a Frank Miller cameo performance) made it into the finished film, but not much, and in 2003 pal Grant adapted it for an Avatar miniseries.

Miller also co-wrote 1993’s *RoboCop 3* – actually, a rewrite of his *RoboCop 2* script – which this time faired slightly better, but not much. Now Grant has adapted this *RoboCop 3* screenplay as *RoboCop: Last Stand*, a tale that sees our hero as a renegade, hunted by the police, pilloried by the media, but still loved by many of the people, including a new female ally, a hottie called Marie who seems determined to make him fall in love with her. Also out there: a collapsing OCP, thrashing in its death throws, and a high-tech new Japanese cyborg designed to take out RoboCop once and for all.

Though by no means terrible – it’s certainly got energy, and it all kinda works – there’s a sense of reheated dinner to *RoboCop: Last Stand* that robs it of potency. It’s in no way a bad comic, but in the context of the current Boom! Studios it ain’t a great one either. **Matt Bielby**



There's a Mexican vibe to this low-key *100 Bullets* sequel.


BLAM
WHAT NOW? IT'S ONLY A MATTER OF TIME BEFORE THEY GET THROUGH
WHAT NOW IS WE HEAD BACK TO THE RIG. THE PART THAT'S STILL STANDING AT LEAST. AND WE TRY OUR BEST TO RADIO FOR HELP.

As tasteful as the original *100 Bullets*.

It's not *The Abyss*, it's *The Wake*.

YOU THERE, DASH?
GOOD BOY...
...GOOOO BOY.

VERTIGO ROUND-UP

DC's weird fiction imprint is reborn, and it's stranger than ever...

100 BULLETS: BROTHER LONO
WRITER: Brian Azzarello
ARTIST: Eduardo Risso
★★★½

THE WAKE
WRITER: Scott Snyder
ARTIST: Sean Murphy
★★★★½

TRILLIUM
WRITER/ARTIST: Jeff Lemire
OUT: now
★★★★

Vertigo – the edgy DC dark fantasy, crime and weird superhero line – has been around since the early '90s, and has in many ways shown the way for all the cool Images and Dark Horses and Boom! Studios that proliferate today. But in 2010 it was announced that it would be strip-mined, with the edgy superhero-type titles that have been its mainstay returned to the current incarnation of the regular DC Universe – characters like Swamp Thing and John Constantine were all gone by early 2013 – and a new policy in place that would allow for creator-owned books only.

It left Vertigo looking rather bare; a shadow of its former self, really, with only the long-running *Fables*, and more recent hits like *The Unwritten* and *American Vampire*, holding the fort.

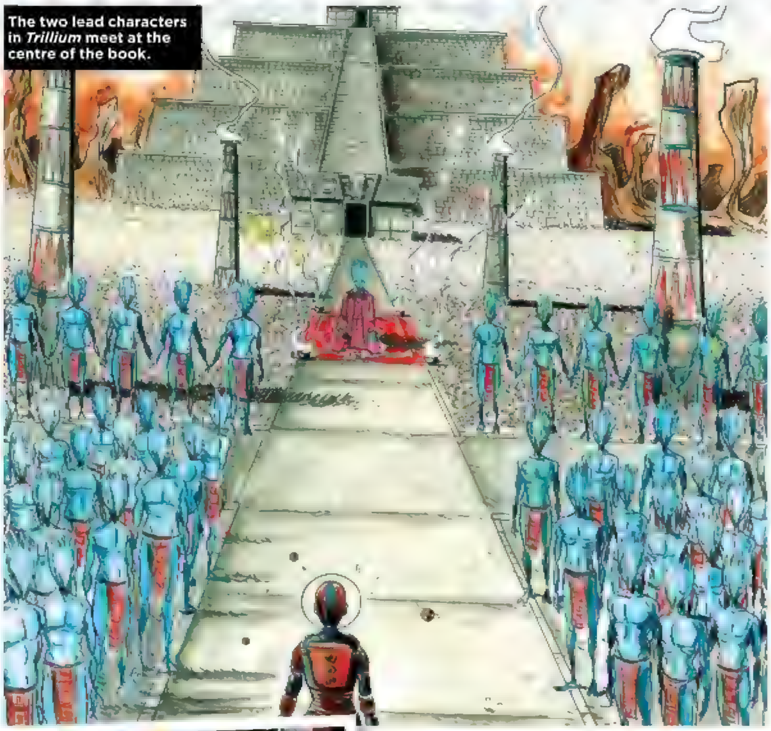
Not that this was ever going to be allowed to remain the case for long, of course. A new Vertigo is rapidly taking shape, and what we've seen so far is promising indeed.

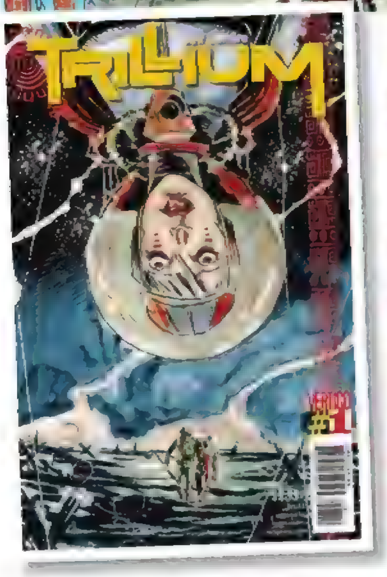
Very welcome, for instance, is ***100 Bullets: Brother Lono***, a slow-burn miniseries reprise of the classic crime series by Brian Azzarello and Eduardo Risso that ran 100 issues across the noughties, and which made big names of both creators. Telling of an intensely complicated covert war amongst members of The Trust – powerful crime families – and their agents, it ended with many of the major characters dead, including the charismatic, sadistic, ultra-violent Lono, who'd been shot several times and fell though a window, though his body was never *actually* shown.

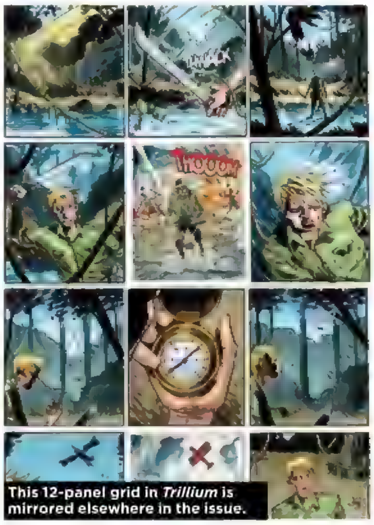
In *Brother Lono* he appears to have survived, of course, and is down in a Mexico ruled by drug gangs, where fingers and noses are removed in retaliation, enemies are fed to the wolves and the once bestial Lono appears to have turned over a new leaf, working with the most disturbingly sexy nun at an orphanage. Goodness knows what's going on here, but it's as beautifully crafted as ever, and – though the tale it tells may possibly prove inessential – it's good to have the irredeemable old bastard back.

100 Bullets, however, is very much a known quantity, so it's perhaps

> **❝ Goodness knows what's going on here, but it's as beautifully crafted as ever ❞**


The two lead characters in *Trillium* meet at the centre of the book.





This 12-panel grid in *Trillium* is mirrored elsewhere in the issue.

more exciting to see other new series at Vertigo. ***The Wake*** is a straight-up underwater horror story – sort of *The Abyss* meets *Jurassic Park* with scary mermen – by the ubiquitous Scott Snyder, writer of *Batman*, *American Vampire* and currently one of DC's biggest guns, and artist Sean Murphy, of *Punk Rock Jesus* fame.

THE KRAKEN WAKES

We're on a huge underwater rig, with a limited cast being picked off one-by-one by what appears to be an aggressive, powerful offshoot of humanity that returned to the sea five million years ago. There are strongly-drawn characters, a scattering of real science to give it verisimilitude, shocking jumps between time zones and impressive action sequences. We get plenty of twists and real shocks, and an intriguing built-of-short-chapters structure too. It's really strong.

As, too, is ***Trillium*** by Canadian writer/artist Jeff Lemire, best known for the Vertigo series *Sweet Tooth*, and whose graphic novel *The Underwater Welder* was so impressive last year. A love story between a shell-shocked British soldier-cum-explorer from 1921 and a woman from the far future, when the human race is making a desperate last stand in a far corner of the galaxy against an intelligent virus that wants us all dead, it adds colour to Lemire's usually black and white work – to very effective results – and has great fun with storytelling and structure.

The first issue is particularly impressive, for instance, with two covers and a pair of 14-page stories, each following one of our two leads – William and Nika – on an adventure that eventually leads them to an Amazonian Inca temple, where they bump into each other at the issue's centre. Each tale is told with exactly the same page layouts – a 12 panel grid on the first page, a double-page-splash on pages 10 and 11, and so on – in beautiful echo of each other.

It's quite something and, if Vertigo can make this sort of quality the norm, the company's real glory years may yet be to come. **Matt Bielby**

TITAN ROUND-UP

More goodness from Titan's new comic line...

SOLID STATE TANK GIRL
WRITER: Alan C Martin
ARTIST: Warwick Johnson-Cadwell
★★½

TOMORROWLAND
WRITER: Paul Jenkins
ARTISTS: Alti Firmansyah & Beny Maulana
★★

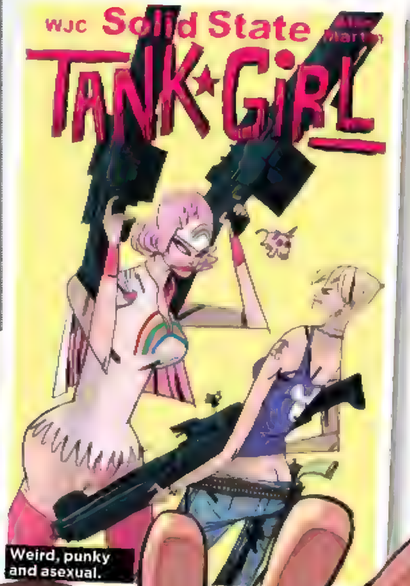
Last issue we looked at the launch of Titan Comics – a fresh new British publisher, spinning out of Titan Books – and generally liked what we saw, with *Lenore* and *Death Sentence* the early stand-outs.

Two books we didn't look at, however, were ***Solid State Tank Girl*** – the character being the nearest thing to a household name in the initial Titan tranche – and ***Tomorrowland***, created by the well-known British writer Paul Jenkins, who's worked on everything from *Hellblazer* to the Wolverine tale, *Origin*. So let's amend that now.

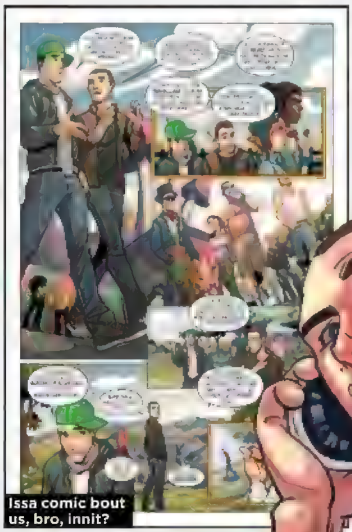
Both are quirkily good looking books, but they're hard to love – and for different reasons. With *Tank Girl*, the character has spun through all sorts of incarnations since co-creator and original illustrator Jamie Hewlett left for Gorillaz in the mid-'90s, including a whole decade where she more or less disappeared.

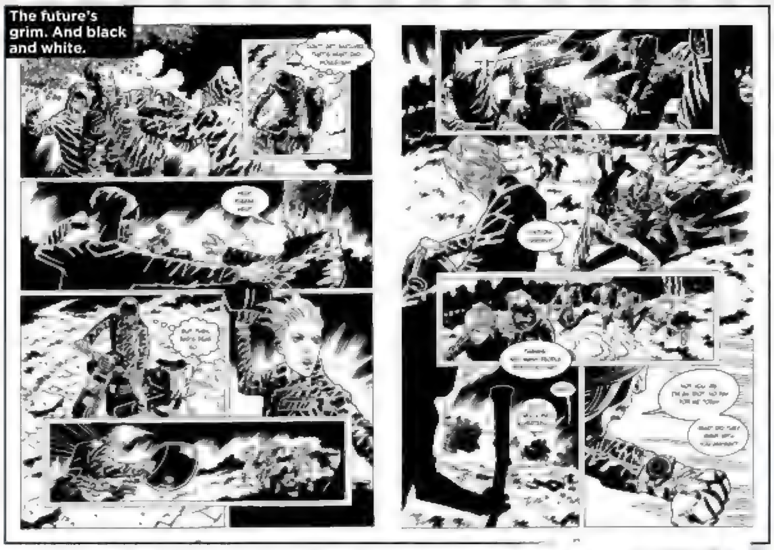
Since 2007, however, original writer Alan Martin has been doing new miniseries with artists like Mick McMahon, Ashley Wood and – especially – Rufus Dayglo. Newly on board for the latest, *Solid State Tank Girl*, is Warwick Johnson-Cadwell, whose stuff is very bright and strange, keeping the punky, anarchic aesthetic of the original strip but completely jettisoning any hint of sexiness. With a story built around energetic pastiches of *Fantastic Voyage*, *Transformers* and *Zulu*, and peppered with the usual '70s references and fart jokes, it's business as usual – and you'll surely know by now if you like this stuff or not. I don't hate it, but I'm certainly getting the feeling that I've seen it all before.

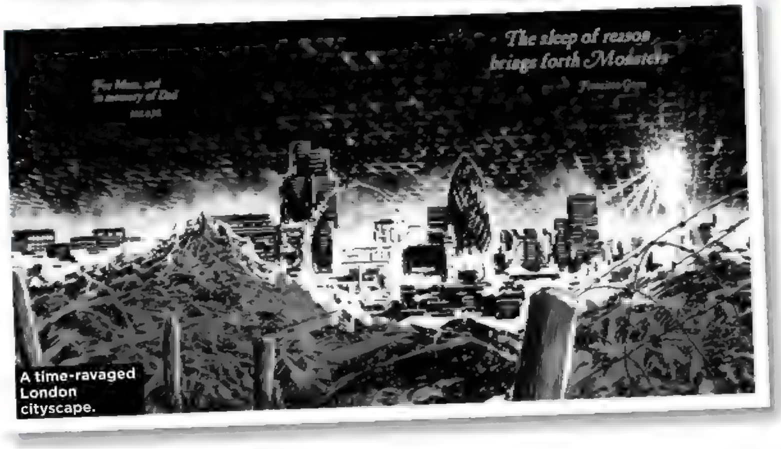
Jenkins's *Tomorrowland*, with sleek, brightly-coloured manga-esque art by Alti Firmansyah, has a different problem: there's almost too much going on, with a devilish (but strangely impotent) bad guy, hordes of invading fantasyland creatures, a cheerleader squad led by the likes of Oscar Wilde and Bill Shakespeare, and, as our heroes, two doofus DJ brothers whose apparent job is to hold off the hordes of entropy, and thus save the universe, if they manage to play a particularly amazing set. It's inventive, I guess, and sort of different – but makes little impact beyond that of a light show. Over-complicated and uncertain of tone, I simply did not believe any of it – and wondered constantly how such proud beasts as bat-demons and flying lions could be the enemies of creativity, while two guys in baseballs hats are its champions. Other way around, surely? **Matt Bielby**



Weird, punky and asexual.


Issa comic bout us, bro, innit?


The future's grim. And black and white.


The sleep of reason brings forth Monsters
Francisco Goya
A time-ravaged London cityscape.

DARK SATANIC MILLS

WRITERS: Marcus Sedgwick & Julian Sedgwick
ARTISTS: John Higgins & Marc Olivent
PUBLISHER: Walker Books
OUT: 7 November
★★★☆☆

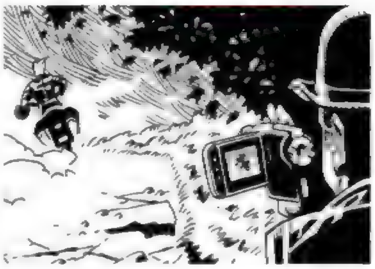
Dark Satanic Mills

The world of fiction is overflowing with dystopias at the moment. We're of the thinking that this trend for pessimistic futures is down to one of two things: the economy, or the fact that crappy futures are fun to write.

Dark Satanic Mills was *clearly* a lot of fun for the brothers Sedgwick to put together. The story of an apparent miracle in a knackered future England, a young motorcycle courier and a power grab by the fascist True Church, it rattles by at a rare pace, all action and über-angry Christians.

It's written with William Blake in mind and references to *Jerusalem* are peppered throughout, as are other nods to the industrial era such as machine breakers and suspicion of science, but where this should deepen the story it only makes the lack of any real substance all the more apparent. Characters are underdeveloped and the isn't-fundamentalism-bad theme is overly simplistic, making for a frustrating reading experience.

The artwork is appropriately dark and dramatic and paints a believably grim picture of an England that festers beneath a giant radiation shield. There are plenty of good ideas – at times *Dark Satanic Mills* feels like a prequel to *V For Vendetta* as we watch the fascists force their way to the top – but that the story fails to truly take flight only leaves you wondering what might have been. A valiant effort then, but one that falls some way short of its lofty aspirations. **Rob Power**



SCIENCE: A DISCOVERY IN COMICS

WRITER/ARTIST: Margreet De Heer
PUBLISHER: NBM
OUT: Now
★★★★☆

SCIENCE
a Discovery in Comics
Margreet de Heer

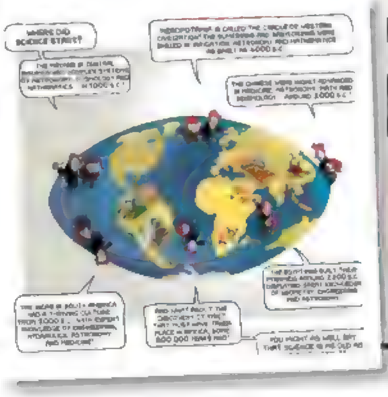
Science never used to be cool. We can remember the science club at school being particularly under attended, and it certainly wasn't a subject that could ever be called sexy.

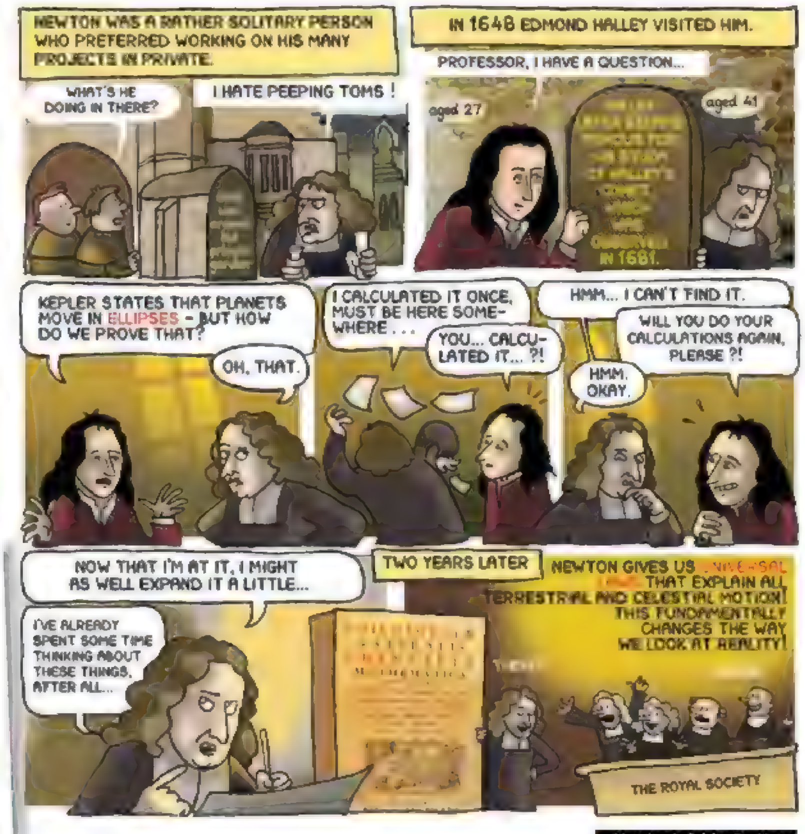
All that has changed now of course, what with Brian Cox and his lovely hair luring us all in with his scientific siren song and lilting northern vowels. Science is the topic of the times, and Margreet De Heer's book is just the thing to make sure unscientific folks aren't left behind.

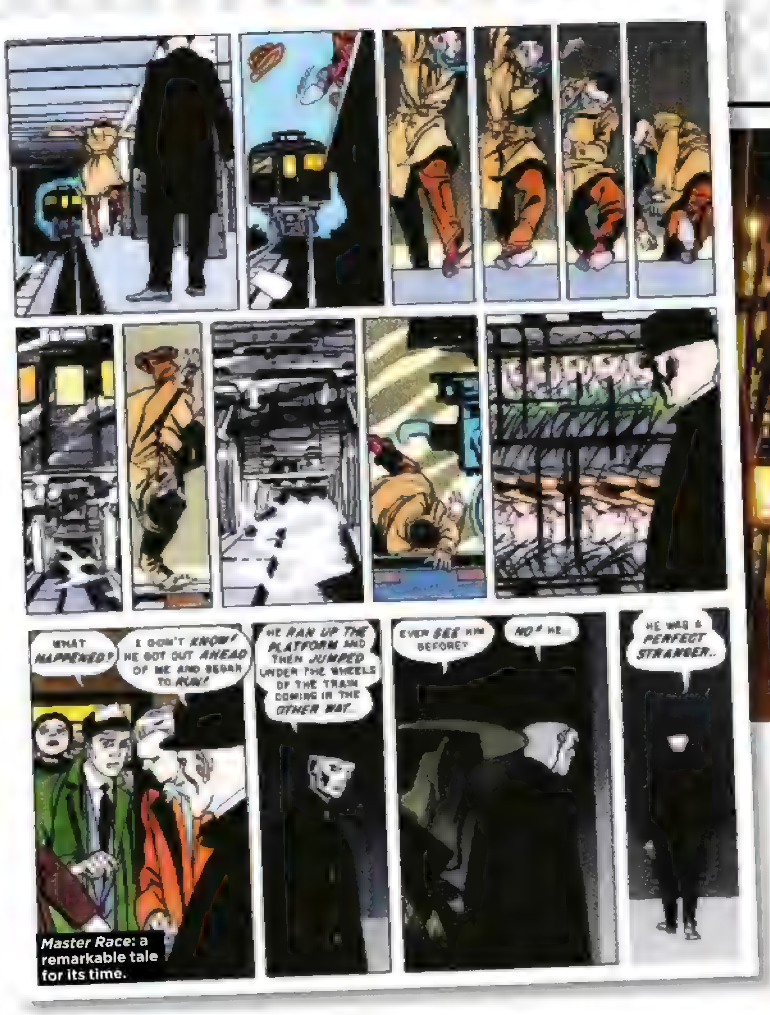
Presented in an informal style that might seem initially too childish for some in appearance but is actually rather sophisticated in terms of content, *Science: A Discovery In Comics* takes us from the earliest days of the scientific method in ancient Greece all the way through to… well, everything.

Mathematics, chemistry, Newtonian physics, thermodynamics, relativity, astronomy, geology, quantum theory – it's all here in one form or another. The subjects covered are vast and varied, and while there's not the sort of depth that'd challenge the likes of Dr Cox, there's more than enough to guide tentative first steps into scientific waters. Light in tone with a clear and concise cartoony style, De Heer keeps things fun and fascinating, closer in style to, say, The Oatmeal than *New Scientist*.

Unfortunately our almost complete lack of any real scientific knowledge means we're unable to vouch for the veracity of the information here, but it felt right to us. De Heer has succeeded in creating a fun and accessible beginners' guide to the world of science, and we're already feeling better about ourselves having read it. Hooray for that. **Rob Power**

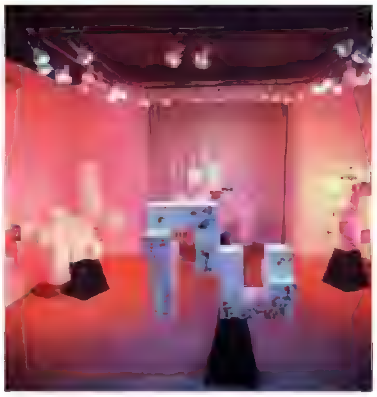

WHERE DID SCIENCE START?

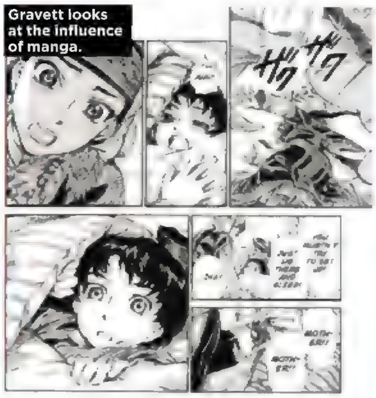

NEWTON WAS A RATHER SOLITARY PERSON WHO PREFERRED WORKING ON HIS MANY PROJECTS IN PRIVATE.
WHAT'S HE DOING IN THERE?
I HATE PEEPING TOMS !
IN 1648 EDMOND HALLEY VISITED HIM.
PROFESSOR, I HAVE A QUESTION...
aged 27
aged 41
IN 1681.
KEPLER STATES THAT PLANETS MOVE IN ELLIPSES – BUT HOW DO WE PROVE THAT?
OH, THAT.
I CALCULATED IT ONCE, MUST BE HERE SOMEWHERE . . .
YOU... CALCULATED IT... ?!
HMM... I CAN'T FIND IT.
WILL YOU DO YOUR CALCULATIONS AGAIN, PLEASE ?!
HMM. OKAY.
NOW THAT I'M AT IT, I MIGHT AS WELL EXPAND IT A LITTLE...
I'VE ALREADY SPENT SOME TIME THINKING ABOUT THESE THINGS, AFTER ALL...
TWO YEARS LATER
NEWTON GIVES US UNIVERSAL LAWS THAT EXPLAIN ALL TERRESTRIAL AND CELESTIAL MOTION! THIS FUNDAMENTALLY CHANGES THE WAY WE LOOK AT REALITY!
THE ROYAL SOCIETY
Newton's fable: De Heer makes science simple.


WHAT HAPPENED?
I DON'T KNOW! HE GOT OUT AHEAD OF ME AND BEGAN TO RUN!
HE RAN UP THE PLATFORM AND THEN JUMPED UNDER THE WHEELS OF THE TRAIN COMING IN THE OTHER WAY...
EVER SEE HIM BEFORE?
NO! HE...
HE WAS A PERFECT STRANGER...

***Master Race*: a remarkable tale for its time.**

Embracing comic books as an art form.





Gravett looks at the influence of manga.

COMICS ART

WRITER: Paul Gravett
PUBLISHER: Tate
OUT: Now
★★★★★

Paul Gravett, as well as being no stranger to *Comic Heroes*, is widely regarded as one of the leading comic historians on the planet. It's no surprise, then, that the Tate approached him to write a book detailing the history of comics art and exploring all its various facets. It's also no surprise to find that he's produced a book as accessible and interesting as it is detailed.

A disclaimer first off: anyone looking for a history of the modern superhero comic is going to be extremely disappointed. Paul acknowledges them and talks at length about them in places, but never directly. This is a book that's far more concerned with the overall history and structure of comics as an art form than exploring a single genre. It's not elitist in the slightest, but it's also not trapped in a single genre or time period and ultimately far stronger for that.

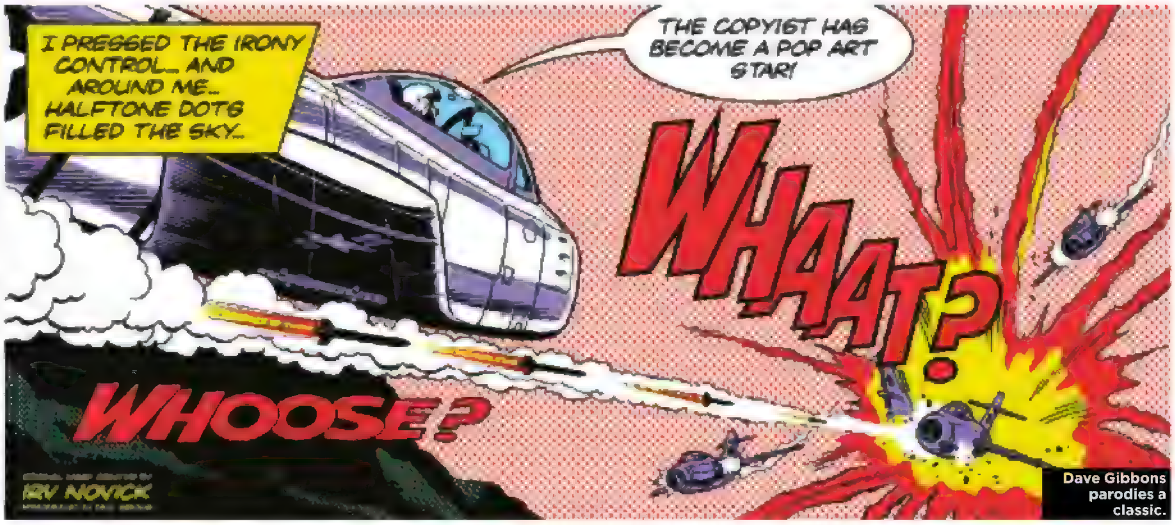
Gravett starts by defining exactly what a comic is, walking the reader through their evolution as an art form and touching on some of the most important books along the way. The details of *Master Race*, Feldstein and Krigstein's 1955 thriller about a concentration camp survivor recognising a guard on the New York subway are especially interesting. Firstly because of the highly charged nature of the story and the time it was created and secondly because of the art. It could just as easily be a page from 2013, with Dave Gibbons-style colouring and panel design. Comics as an art form are relatively young (there's actually an official start date – it's in the book too) but time and again Gravett shows us the clear evolution of the form, from 1896 (that birthday year) all the way to the present day.

Along the way he examines the way we read comics (left to right and down, repeat) and the books that have played with that convention. He also looks at how panel size, and amount, has been used to play with the passage of time on the page.

One of my favourite sections talks about Roy Lichtenstein's infamous parodies of comic art and, instead of simply criticising them, provides a context for Lichtenstein's work that I'd never previously considered. This is what Paul excels at, educating not telling, providing you with context for everything.

This continues all the way through the final chapter, exploring digital comics. Some familiar names reappear here, including the highly acclaimed *Shooting War* and of course *XKCD*. Again, he impresses, embracing the digital age of comics with just as much enthusiasm as everything else. That enthusiasm is infectious too, and you'll finish the book with a long reading list of new titles. Which, we suspect, was Paul's plan all along.

Comics Art is a remarkable achievement. Intensely detailed but never intimidating it approaches this bizarre, wonderful medium with complete enthusiasm and a keen, articulate critical eye. If you're looking for a primer on comics history, you won't find one better. **Alasdair Stuart**


I PRESSED THE IRONY CONTROL... AND AROUND ME... HALFTONE DOTS FILLED THE SKY...
THE COPYIST HAS BECOME A POP ART STAR!
WHAAAT?
WHOOSE?
IRV NOVICK

Dave Gibbons parodies a classic.

TOTAL FILM

Now fully interactive on your iPad

THE FANTASY ISSUE
TOTAL FILM
CATE BLANCHETT TALKS GALADRIEL
THE FANTASY PREVIEW!
The Hobbit 2 & 3
Game Of Thrones
Warcraft & more
+
EXTRA LOKI!
ON-SET EXCLUSIVE!
THOR
THE DARK WORLD
“This Has To Be High Stakes”
TOM HIDDLESTON
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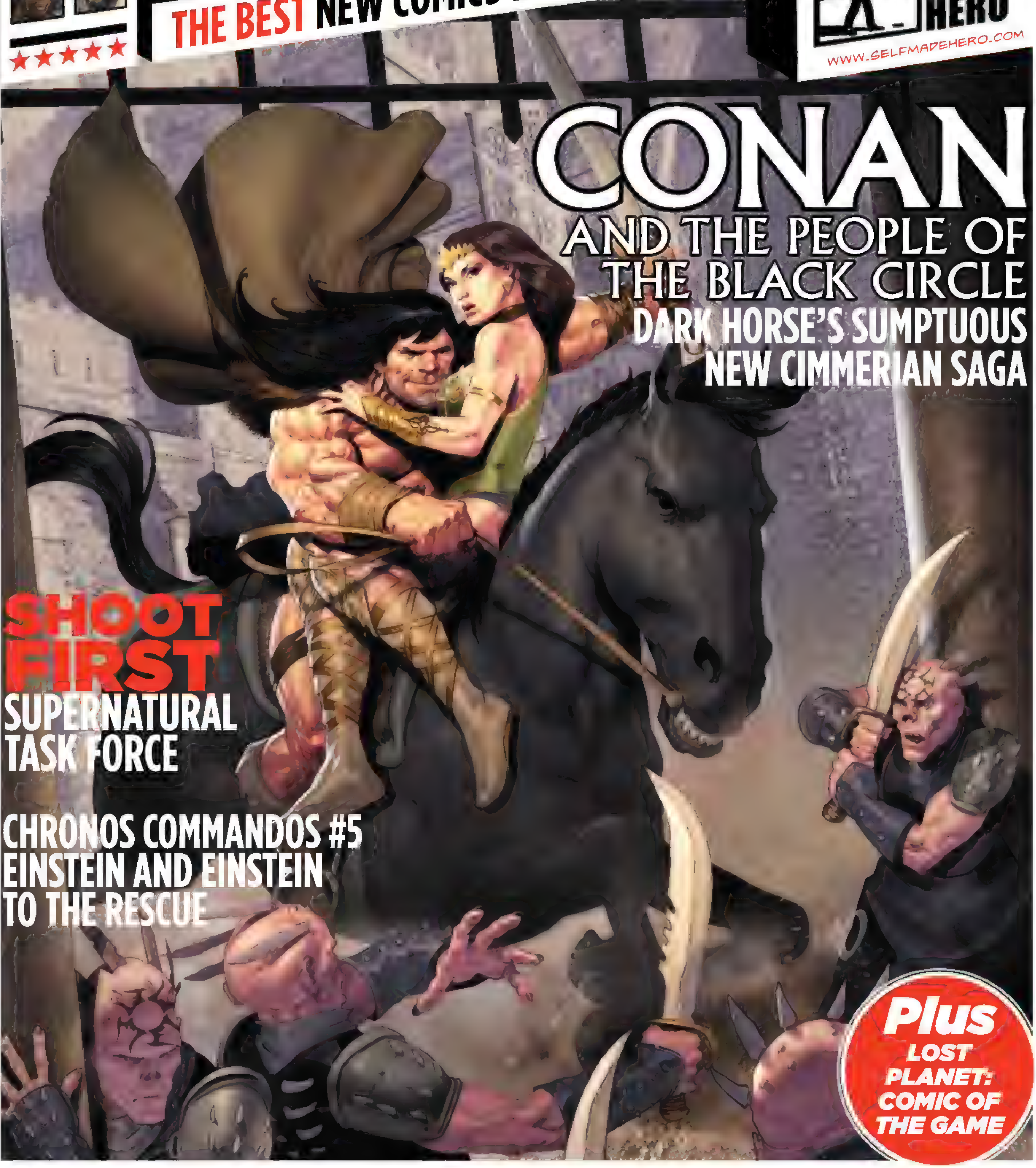


CONAN AND THE PEOPLE OF THE BLACK CIRCLE

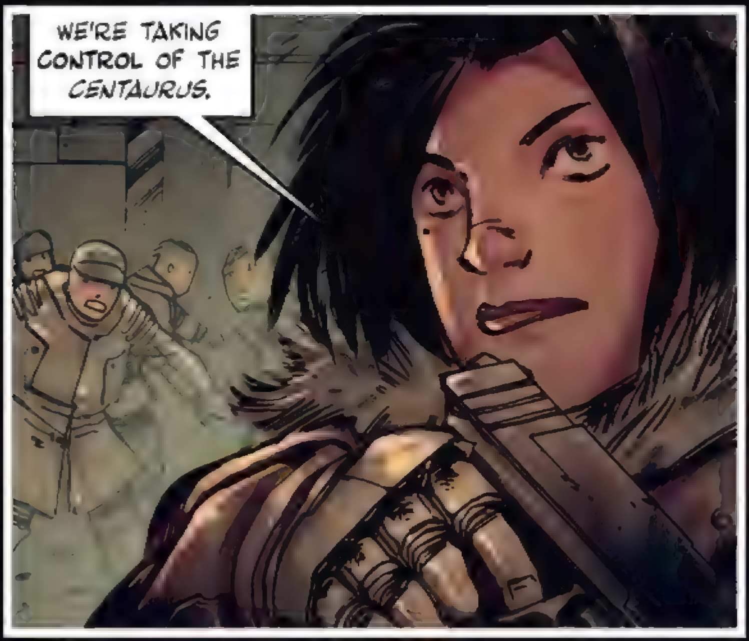
DARK HORSE'S SUMPTUOUS NEW CIMMERIAN SAGA

SHOOT FIRST

SUPERNATURAL TASK FORCE

CHRONOS COMMANDOS #5
EINSTEIN AND EINSTEIN TO THE RESCUE

Plus LOST PLANET: COMIC OF THE GAME


WE'RE TAKING CONTROL OF THE *CENTAURUS*.

Lost Planet Graphic Novel

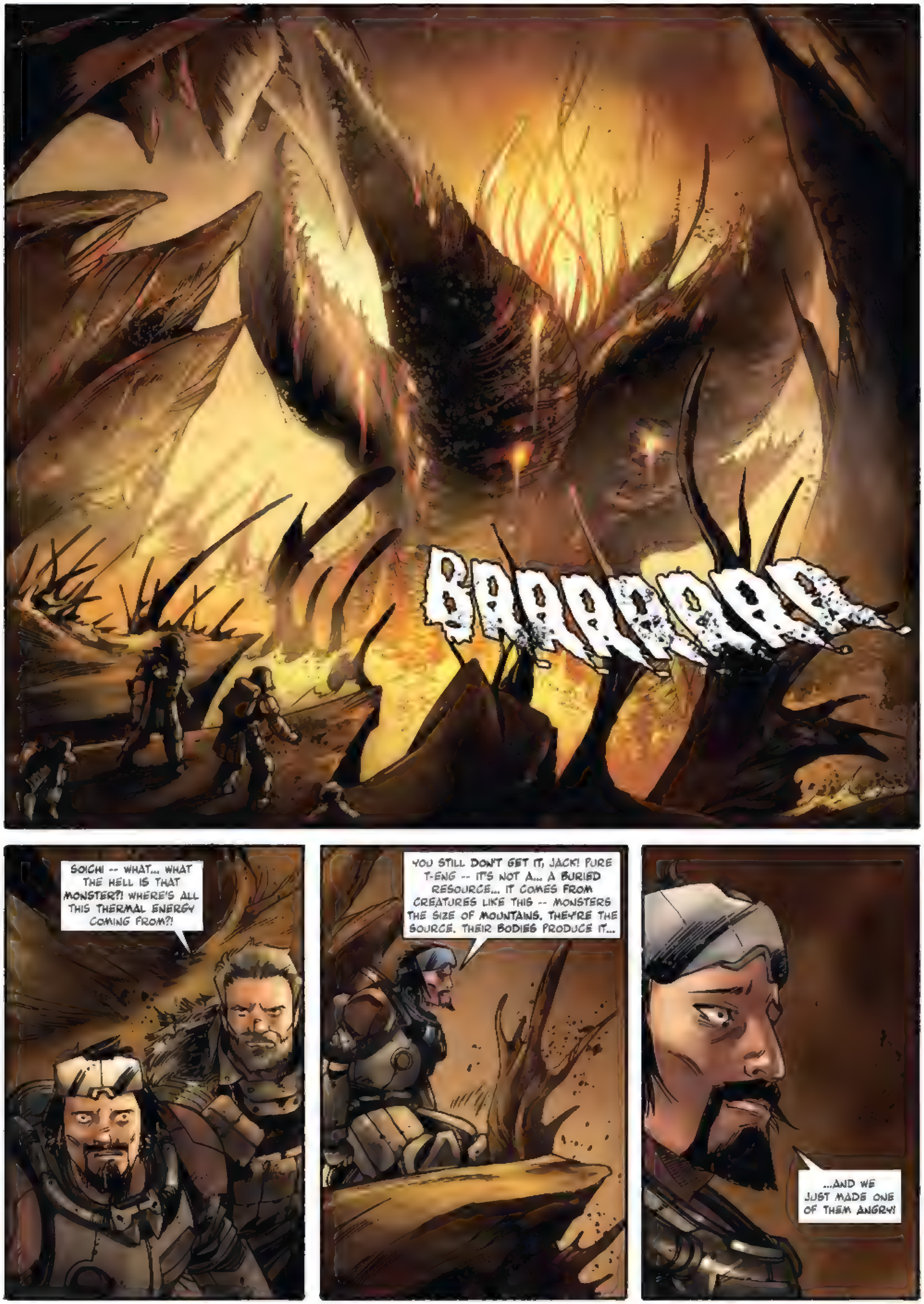
Writer: Izu

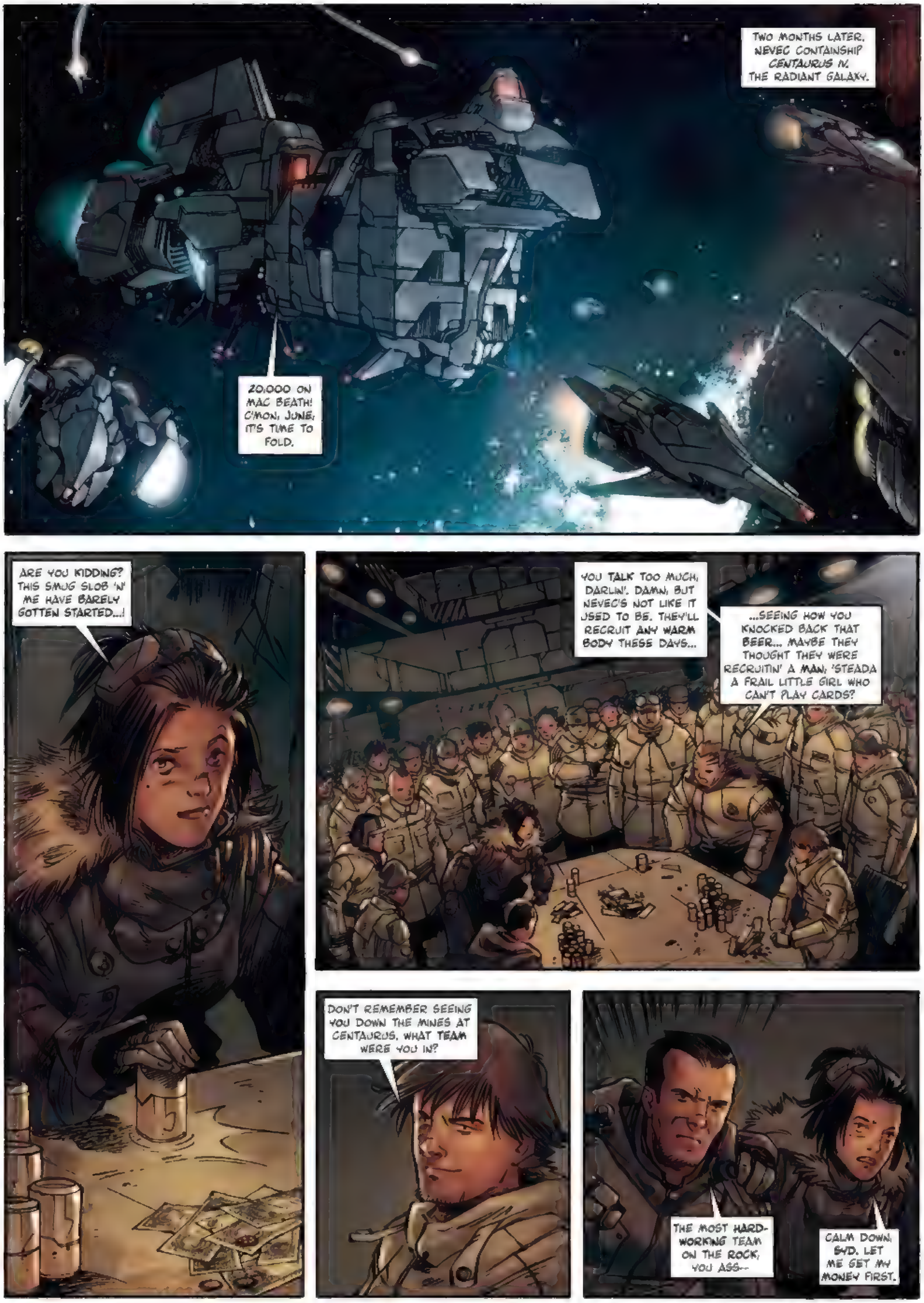
Artist: Massimo Dall'oglio

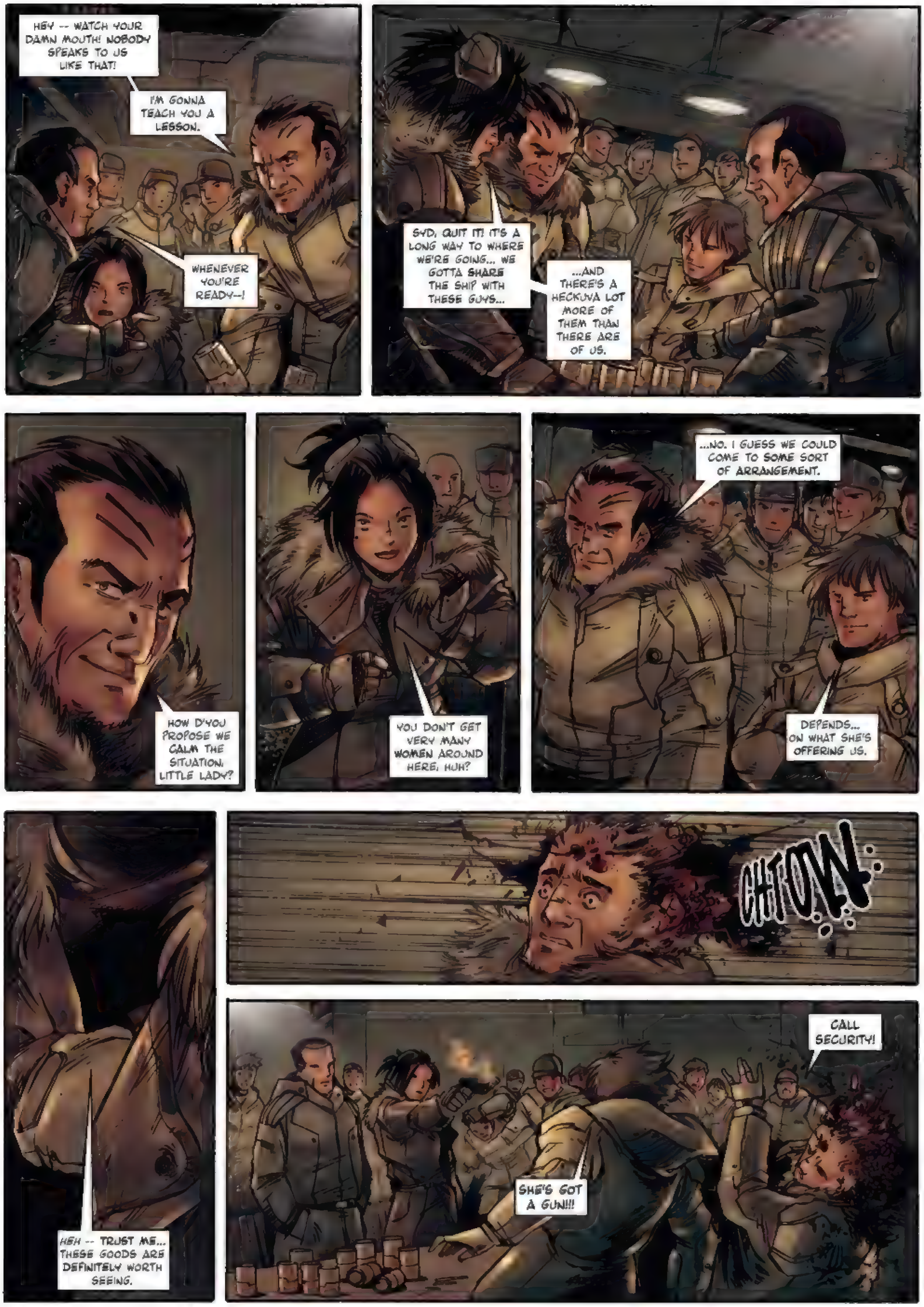
So far, Titan's adaptation of Capcom's sci-fi game has only been available digitally from ComiXology. The graphic novel is coming later this year, so here is your first chance to see how great it looks on gloriously glossy paper!

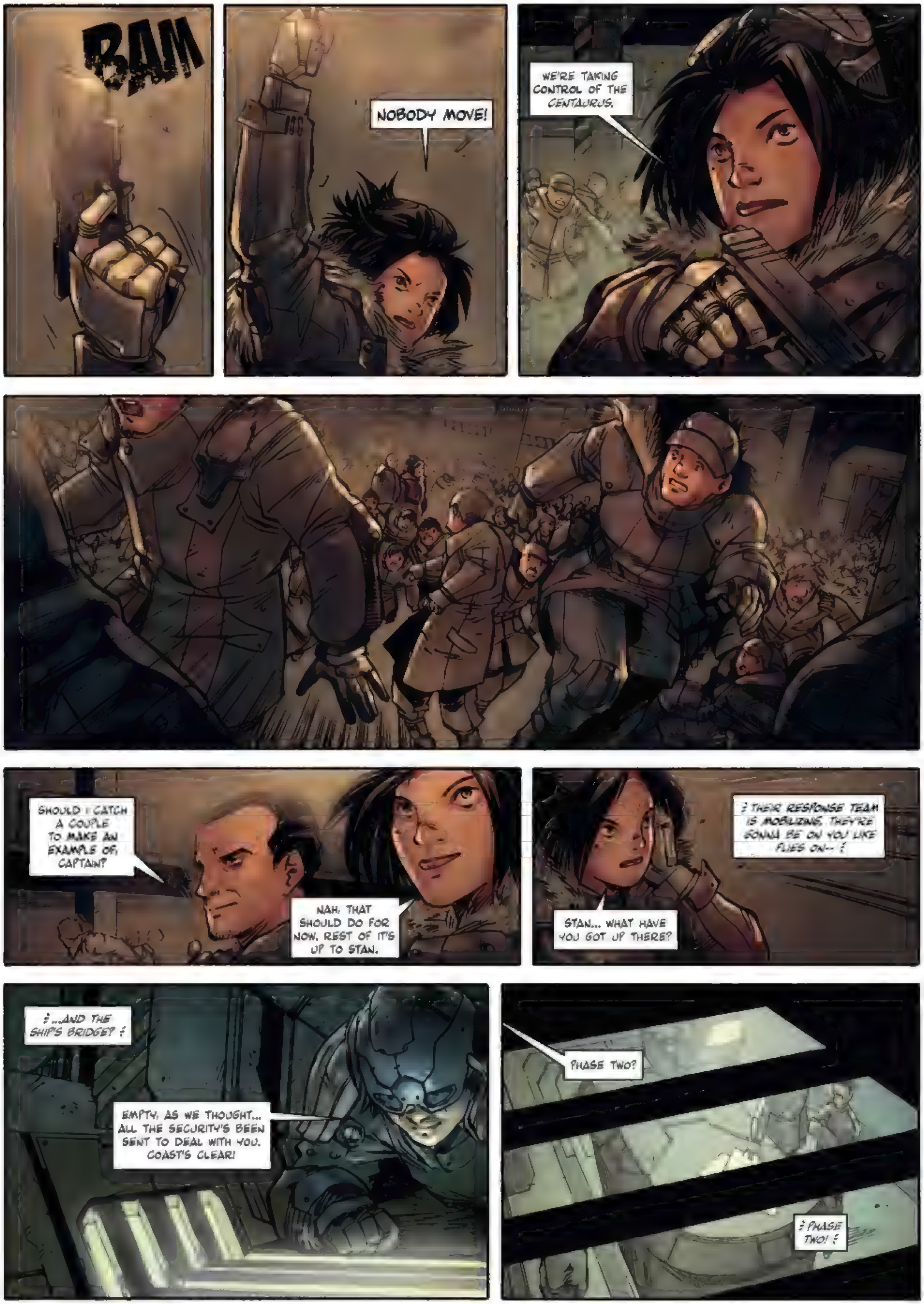
On sale December from Titan Comics

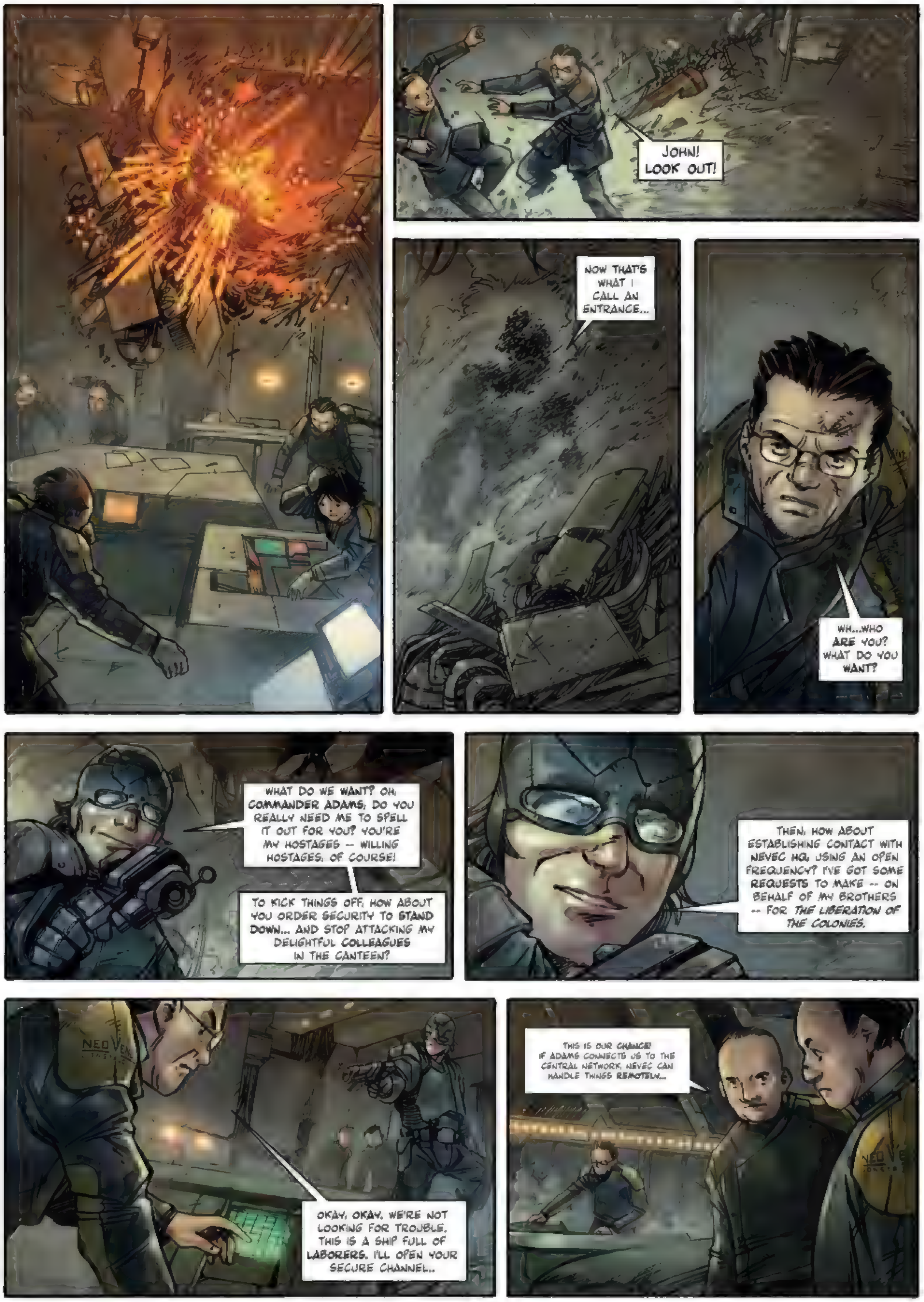
All pages © Titan Comics, Capcom

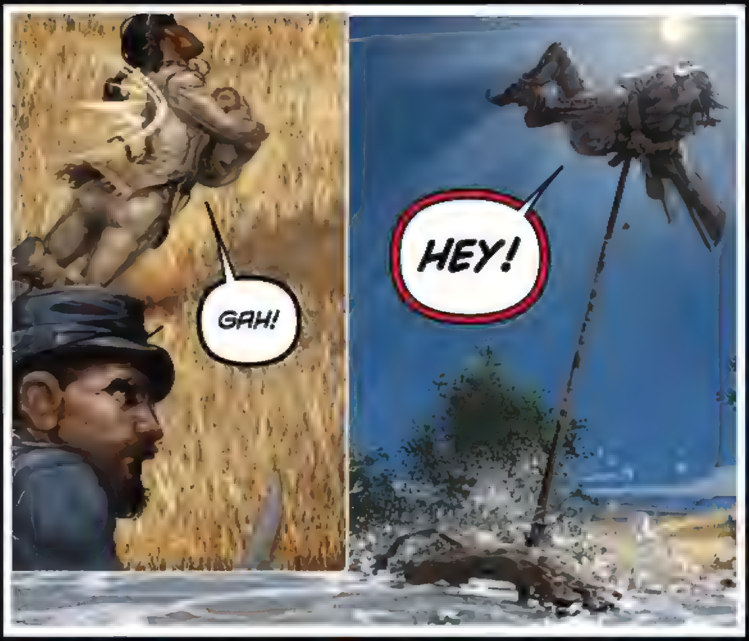

BRAAAAAA
SOICHI -- WHAT... WHAT THE HELL IS THAT MONSTER?! WHERE'S ALL THIS THERMAL ENERGY COMING FROM?!
YOU STILL DON'T GET IT, JACK! PURE T-ENG -- IT'S NOT A... A BURIED RESOURCE... IT COMES FROM CREATURES LIKE THIS -- MONSTERS THE SIZE OF MOUNTAINS. THEY'RE THE SOURCE. THEIR BODIES PRODUCE IT...
...AND WE JUST MADE ONE OF THEM ANGRY!


TWO MONTHS LATER. NEVEC CONTAINSHIP *CENTAURUS IV*. THE RADIANT GALAXY.
20,000 ON MAC BEATH! C'MON, JUNE; IT'S TIME TO FOLD.
ARE YOU KIDDING? THIS SMUG SLOB 'N' ME HAVE BARELY GOTTEN STARTED...!
YOU TALK TOO MUCH, DARLIN'. DAMN, BUT NEVEC'S NOT LIKE IT USED TO BE. THEY'LL RECRUIT ANY WARM BODY THESE DAYS...
...SEEING HOW YOU KNOCKED BACK THAT BEER... MAYBE THEY THOUGHT THEY WERE RECRUITIN' A MAN, 'STEADA A FRAIL LITTLE GIRL WHO CAN'T PLAY CARDS?
DON'T REMEMBER SEEING YOU DOWN THE MINES AT CENTAURUS. WHAT TEAM WERE YOU IN?
THE MOST HARD-WORKING TEAM ON THE ROCK, YOU ASS--
CALM DOWN, SYD. LET ME GET MY MONEY FIRST.


HEY -- WATCH YOUR DAMN MOUTH! NOBODY SPEAKS TO US LIKE THAT!
I'M GONNA TEACH YOU A LESSON.
WHENEVER YOU'RE READY--!
SYD, QUIT IT! IT'S A LONG WAY TO WHERE WE'RE GOING... WE GOTTA SHARE THE SHIP WITH THESE GUYS...
...AND THERE'S A HECKUVA LOT MORE OF THEM THAN THERE ARE OF US.
HOW D'YOU PROPOSE WE CALM THE SITUATION, LITTLE LADY?
YOU DON'T GET VERY MANY WOMEN AROUND HERE, HUH?
...NO. I GUESS WE COULD COME TO SOME SORT OF ARRANGEMENT.
DEPENDS... ON WHAT SHE'S OFFERING US.
HEH -- TRUST ME... THESE GOODS ARE DEFINITELY WORTH SEEING.
CHTOW!
CALL SECURITY!
SHE'S GOT A GUN!!!


BAM
NOBODY MOVE!
WE'RE TAKING CONTROL OF THE CENTAURUS.
SHOULD I CATCH A COUPLE TO MAKE AN EXAMPLE OF, CAPTAIN?
NAH, THAT SHOULD DO FOR NOW. REST OF IT'S UP TO STAN.
STAN... WHAT HAVE YOU GOT UP THERE?
⁝ THEIR RESPONSE TEAM IS MOBILIZING. THEY'RE GONNA BE ON YOU LIKE FLIES ON-- ⁝
⁝ ...AND THE SHIP'S BRIDGE? ⁝
EMPTY, AS WE THOUGHT... ALL THE SECURITY'S BEEN SENT TO DEAL WITH YOU. COAST'S CLEAR!
PHASE TWO?
⁝ PHASE TWO! ⁝


JOHN! LOOK OUT!
NOW THAT'S WHAT I CALL AN ENTRANCE...
WH...WHO ARE YOU? WHAT DO YOU WANT?
WHAT DO WE WANT? OH, COMMANDER ADAMS, DO YOU REALLY NEED ME TO SPELL IT OUT FOR YOU? YOU'RE MY HOSTAGES -- WILLING HOSTAGES, OF COURSE!
TO KICK THINGS OFF, HOW ABOUT YOU ORDER SECURITY TO STAND DOWN... AND STOP ATTACKING MY DELIGHTFUL COLLEAGUES IN THE CANTEEN?
THEN, HOW ABOUT ESTABLISHING CONTACT WITH NEVEC HQ, USING AN OPEN FREQUENCY? I'VE GOT SOME REQUESTS TO MAKE -- ON BEHALF OF MY BROTHERS -- FOR THE LIBERATION OF THE COLONIES.
NEO VEC
OKAY, OKAY, WE'RE NOT LOOKING FOR TROUBLE. THIS IS A SHIP FULL OF LABORERS. I'LL OPEN YOUR SECURE CHANNEL...
THIS IS OUR CHANCE! IF ADAMS CONNECTS US TO THE CENTRAL NETWORK, NEVEC CAN HANDLE THINGS REMOTELY...
NEO VEC



Eternal Warrior #2

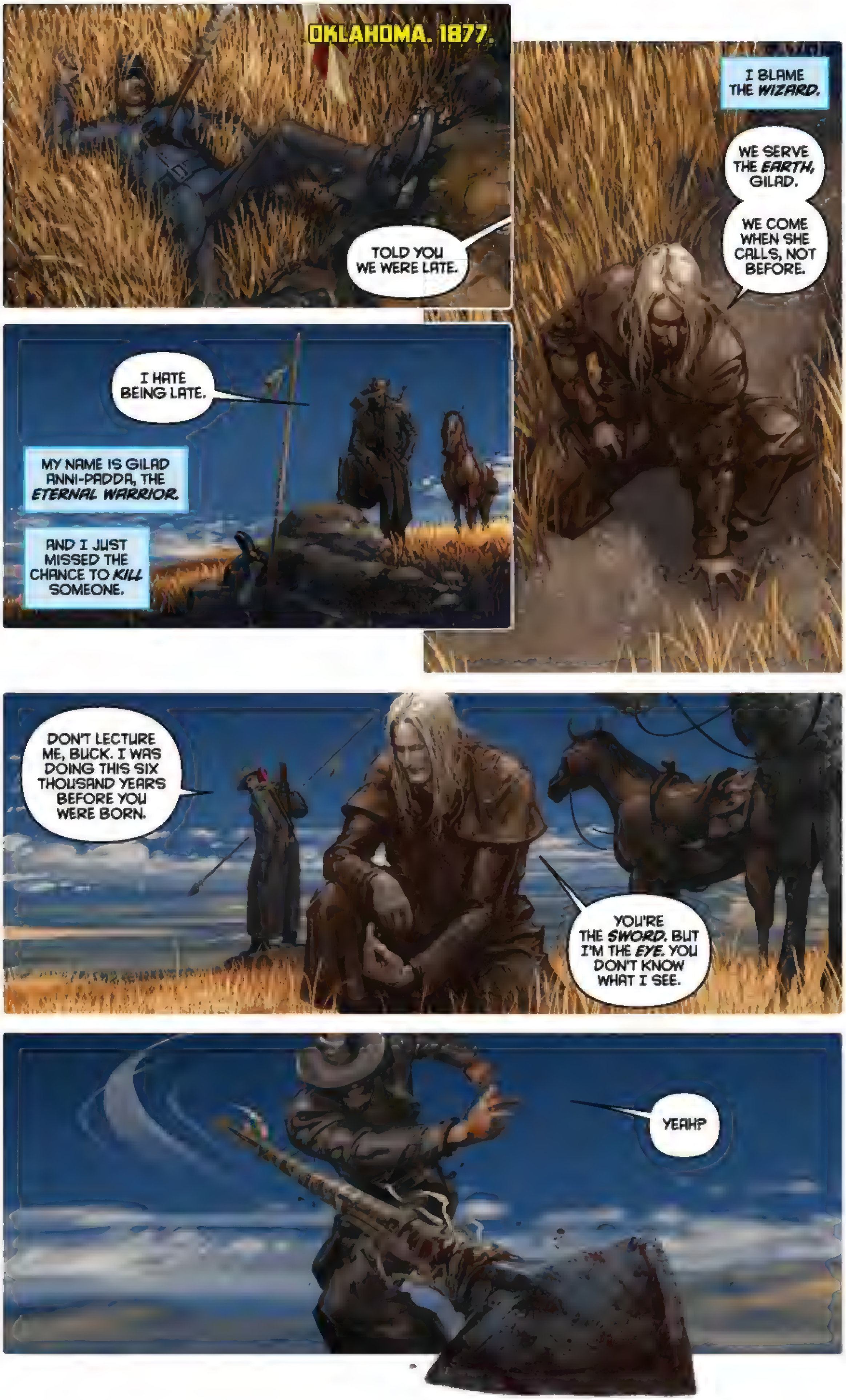
Writer: Greg Pak

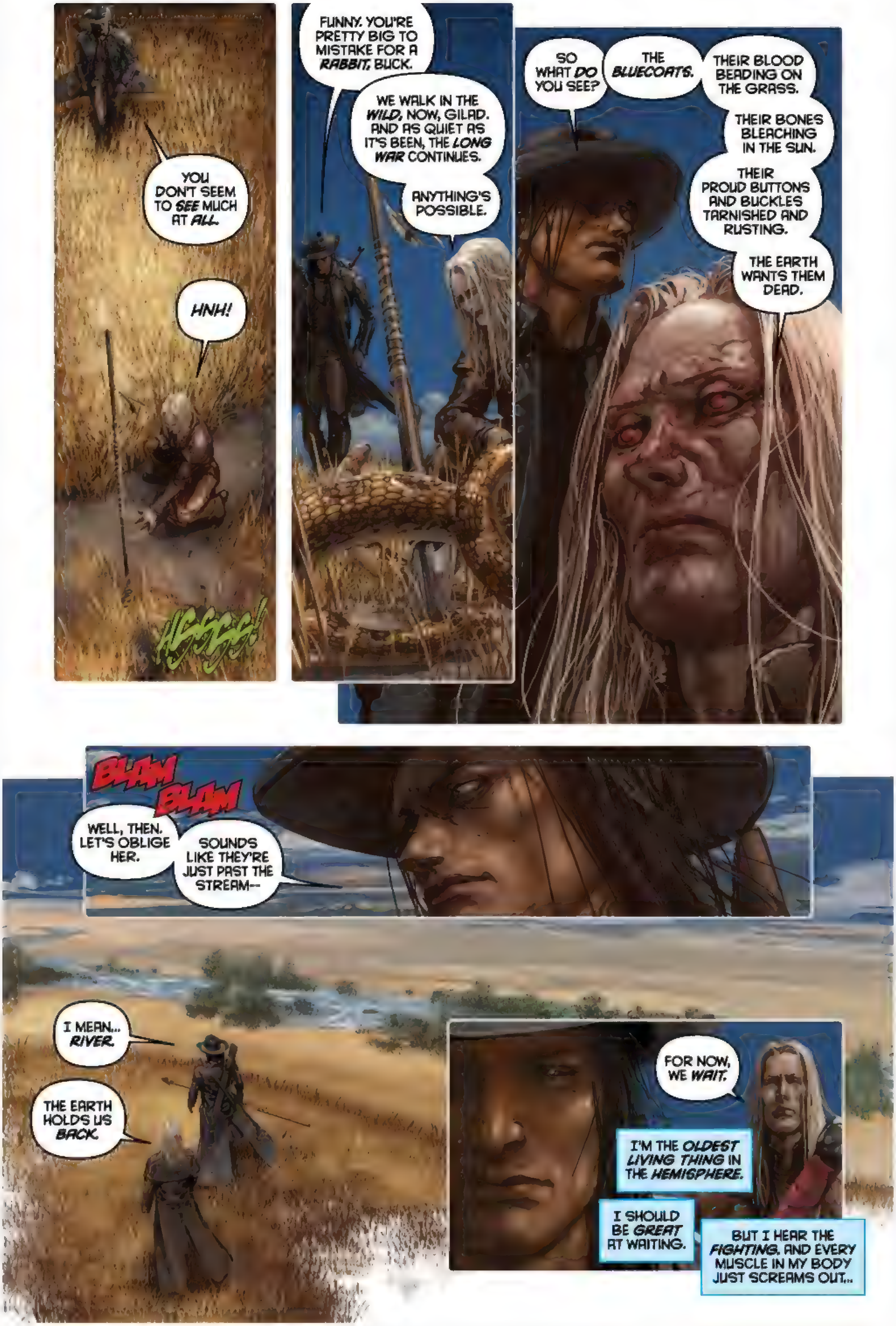
Artist: Trevor Hairsine

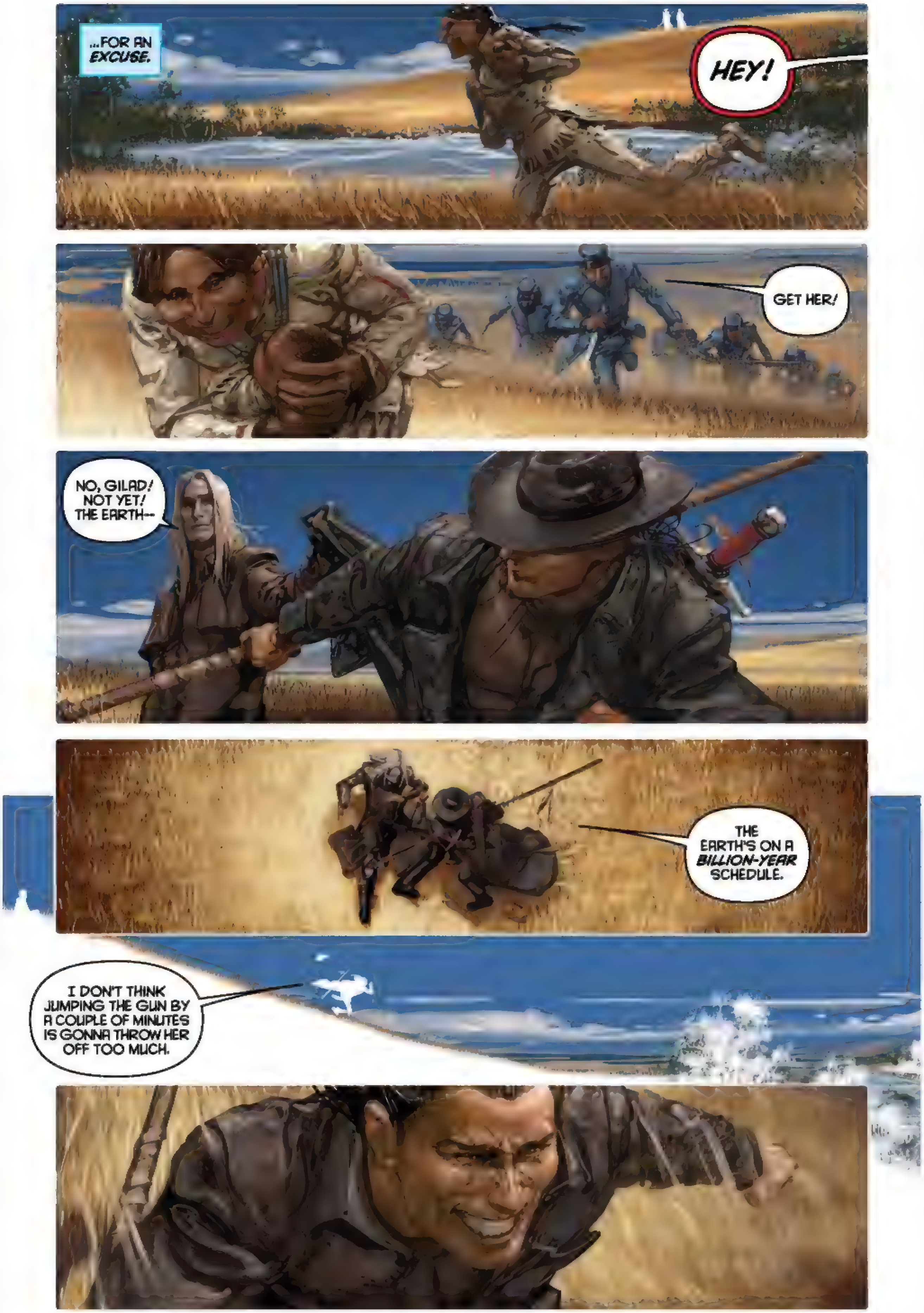
After thousands of years on the battlefield, the Eternal Warrior has finally laid down his sword. But today he learns that when you turn your back on your destiny, your destiny may find another champion.

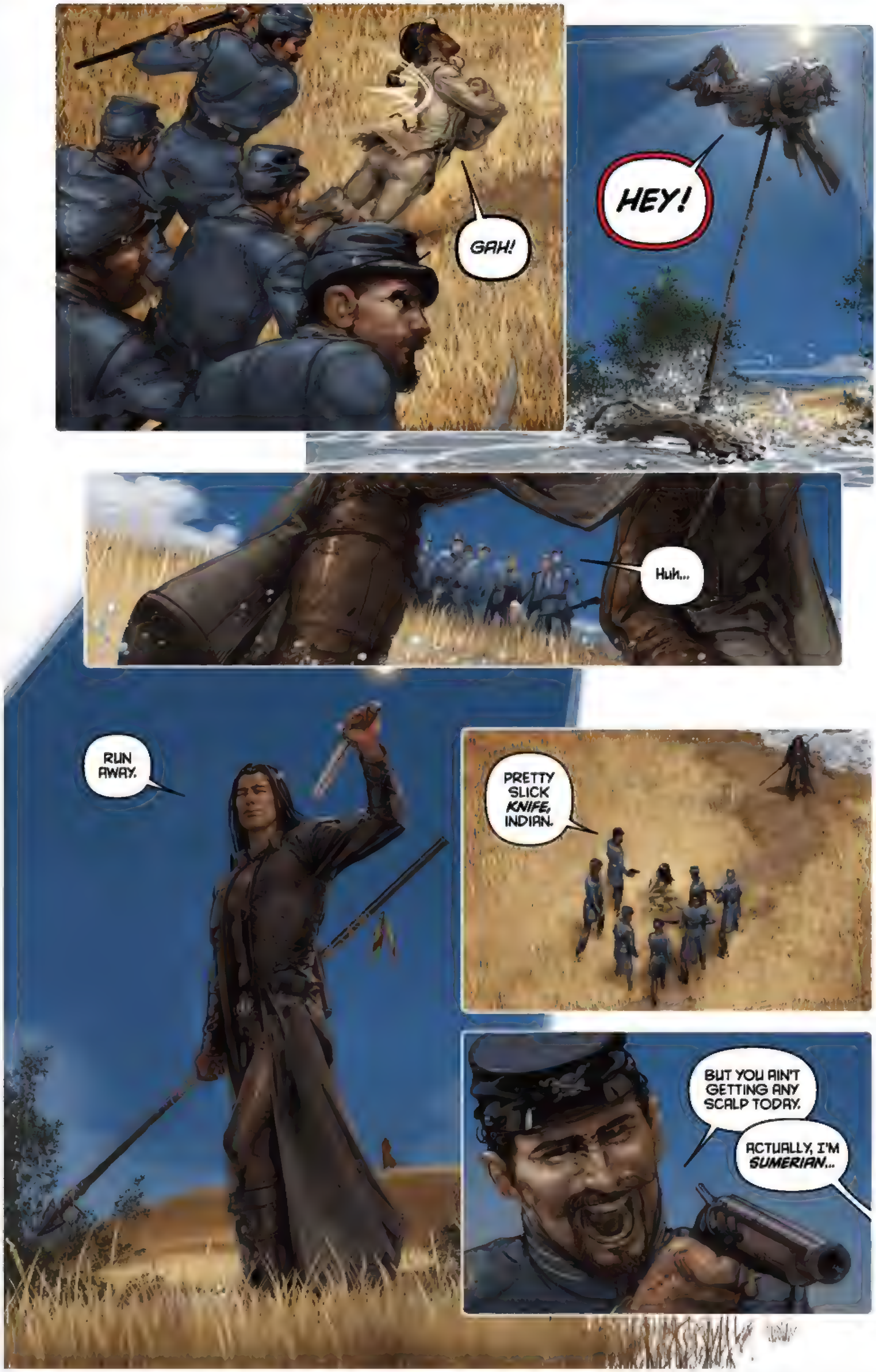
On sale now from Valiant

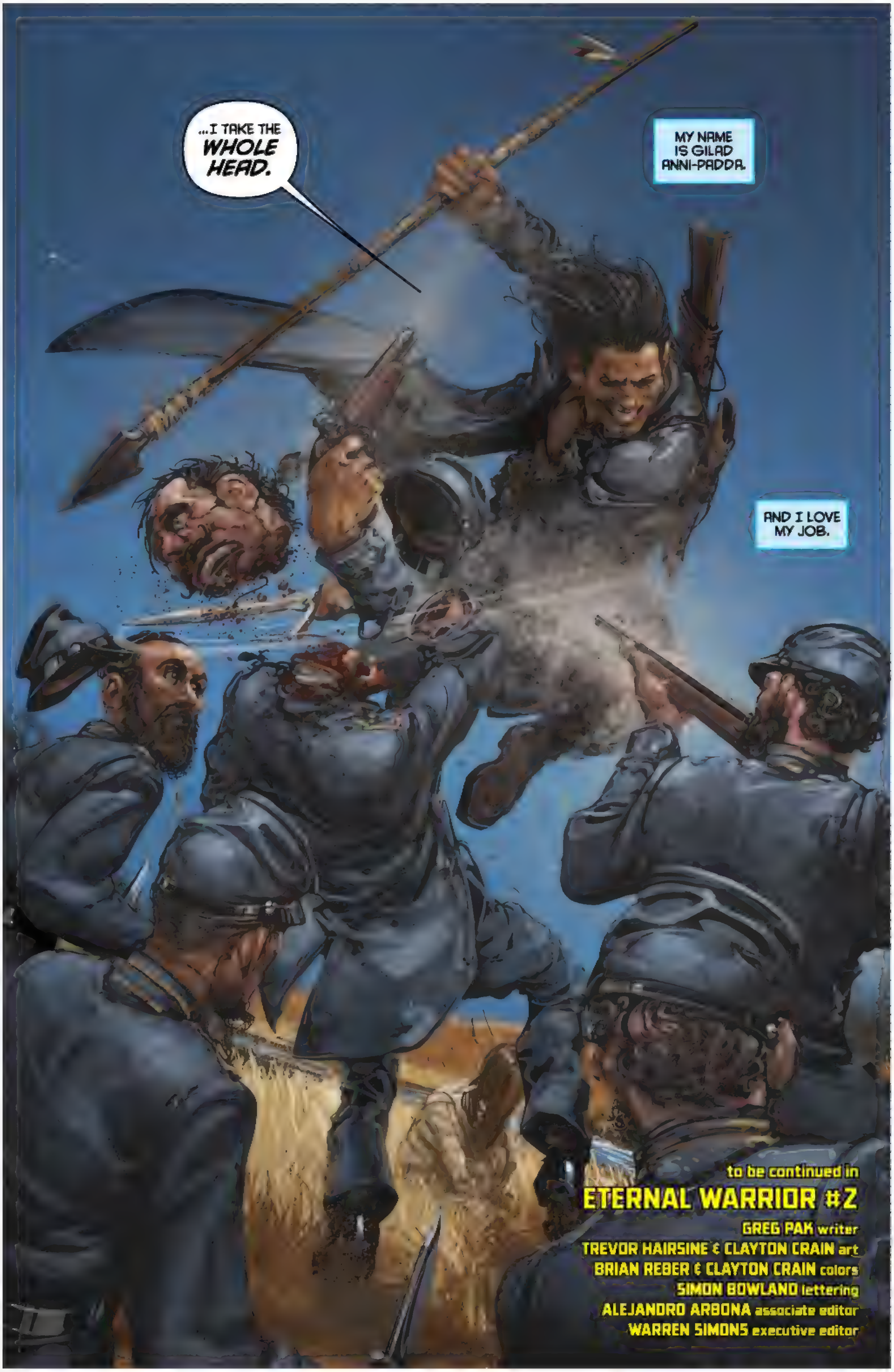
All images © 2013 Valiant Entertainment Inc.

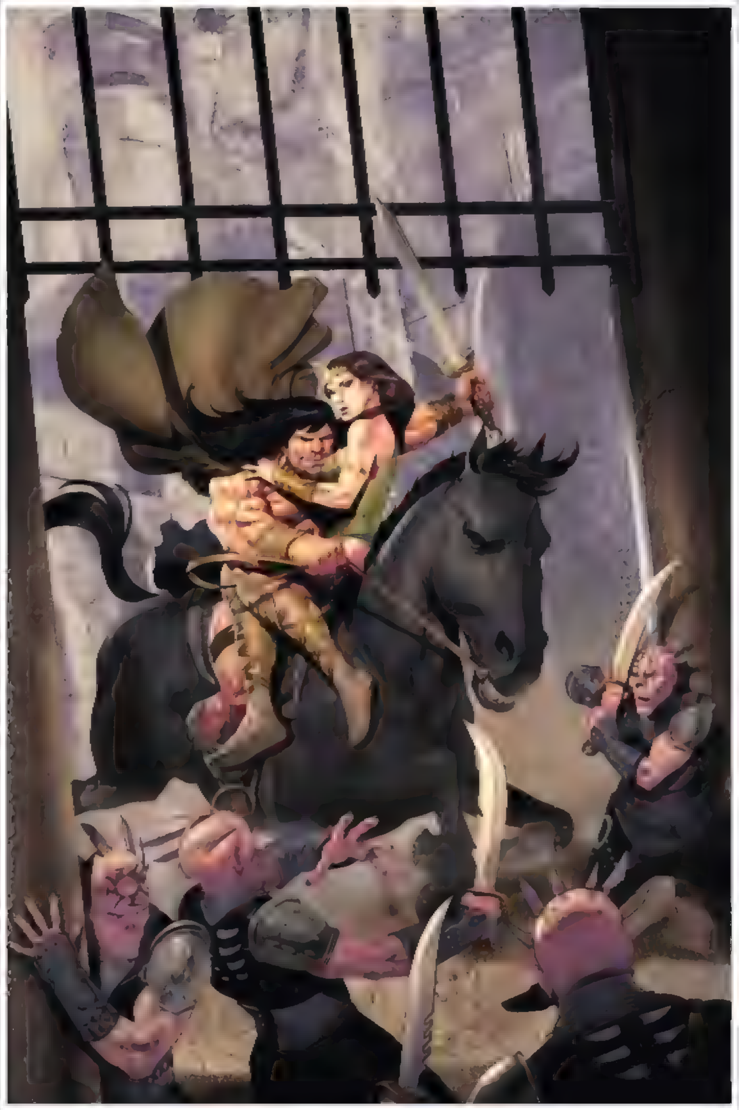

OKLAHOMA. 1877.
TOLD YOU WE WERE LATE.
I HATE BEING LATE.
MY NAME IS GILAD ANNI-PADDA, THE *ETERNAL WARRIOR.*
AND I JUST MISSED THE CHANCE TO *KILL* SOMEONE.
I BLAME THE *WIZARD.*
WE SERVE THE *EARTH,* GILAD.
WE COME WHEN SHE CALLS, NOT BEFORE.
DON'T LECTURE ME, BUCK. I WAS DOING THIS SIX THOUSAND YEARS BEFORE YOU WERE BORN.
YOU'RE THE *SWORD.* BUT I'M THE *EYE.* YOU DON'T KNOW WHAT I SEE.
YEAH?


YOU DON'T SEEM TO SEE MUCH AT ALL.
HNH!
HSSSS!
FUNNY. YOU'RE PRETTY BIG TO MISTAKE FOR A RABBIT, BUCK.
WE WALK IN THE WILD, NOW, GILAD. AND AS QUIET AS IT'S BEEN, THE LONG WAR CONTINUES.
ANYTHING'S POSSIBLE.
SO WHAT DO YOU SEE?
THE BLUECOATS.
THEIR BLOOD BEADING ON THE GRASS.
THEIR BONES BLEACHING IN THE SUN.
THEIR PROUD BUTTONS AND BUCKLES TARNISHED AND RUSTING.
THE EARTH WANTS THEM DEAD.
BLAM BLAM
WELL, THEN. LET'S OBLIGE HER.
SOUNDS LIKE THEY'RE JUST PAST THE STREAM--
I MEAN... RIVER.
THE EARTH HOLDS US BACK.
FOR NOW, WE WAIT.
I'M THE OLDEST LIVING THING IN THE HEMISPHERE.
I SHOULD BE GREAT AT WAITING.
BUT I HEAR THE FIGHTING. AND EVERY MUSCLE IN MY BODY JUST SCREAMS OUT...


...FOR AN *EXCUSE.*
HEY!
GET HER!
NO, GILAD! NOT YET! THE EARTH--
THE EARTH'S ON A *BILLION-YEAR* SCHEDULE.
I DON'T THINK JUMPING THE GUN BY A COUPLE OF MINUTES IS GONNA THROW HER OFF TOO MUCH.


GAH!
HEY!
Huh...
RUN AWAY.
PRETTY SLICK KNIFE, INDIAN.
BUT YOU AIN'T GETTING ANY SCALP TODAY.
ACTUALLY, I'M SUMERIAN...


...I TAKE THE *WHOLE HEAD.*
MY NAME IS GILAD ANNI-PADDA.
AND I LOVE MY JOB.
to be continued in
ETERNAL WARRIOR #2
GREG PAK writer
TREVOR HAIRSINE & CLAYTON CRAIN art
BRIAN REBER & CLAYTON CRAIN colors
SIMON BOWLAND lettering
ALEJANDRO ARBONA associate editor
WARREN SIMONS executive editor



Conan & The People Of The Black Circle

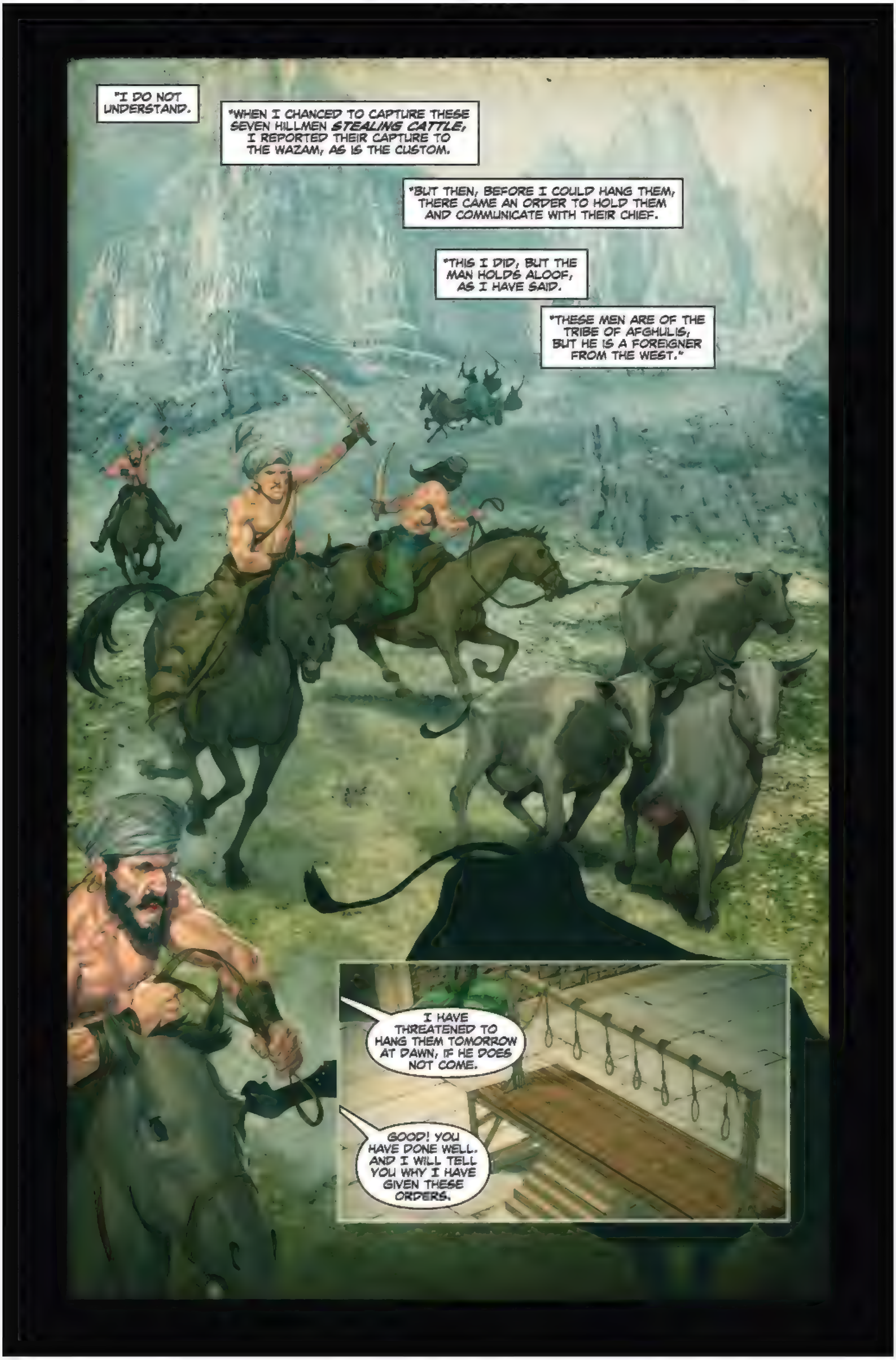
Writer: Fred Van Lente

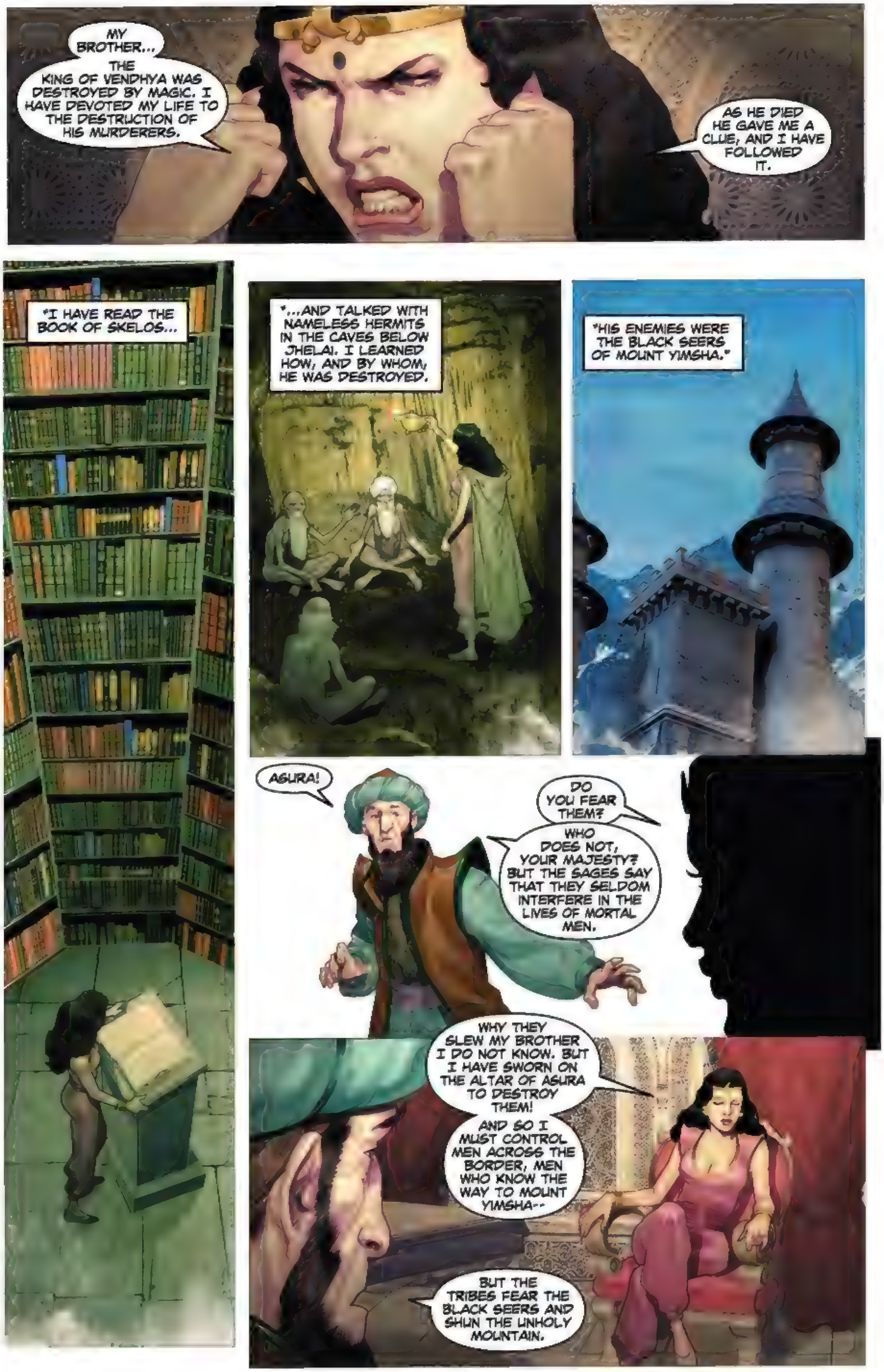
Artist: Ariel Olivetti

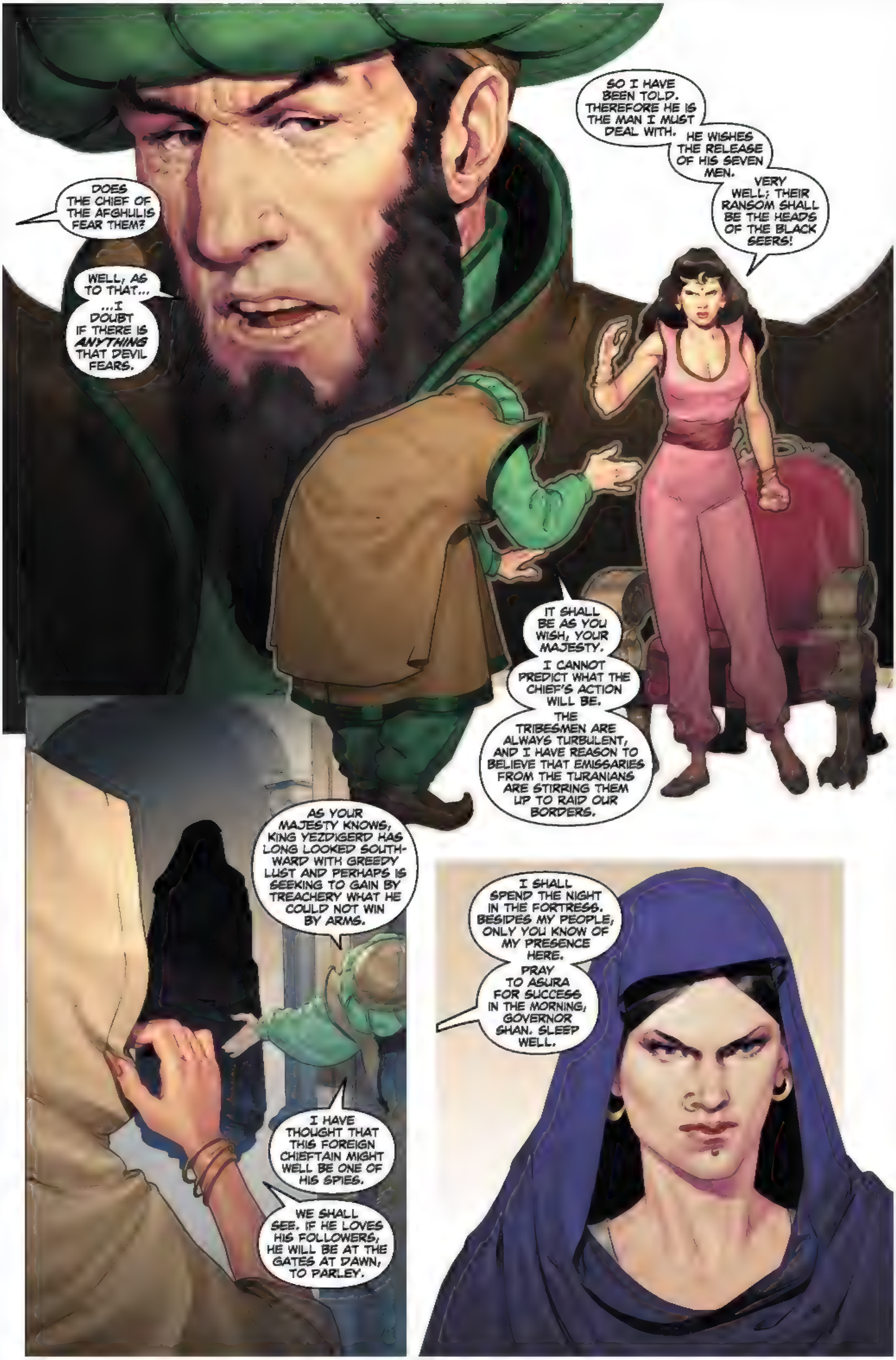
Assassins, dark magic and a beautiful noblewoman spell trouble for the barbarian in this full-tilt escapade through the mountains of Afghulistan! Conan like you've never seen him – fully painted by Ariel Olivetti!

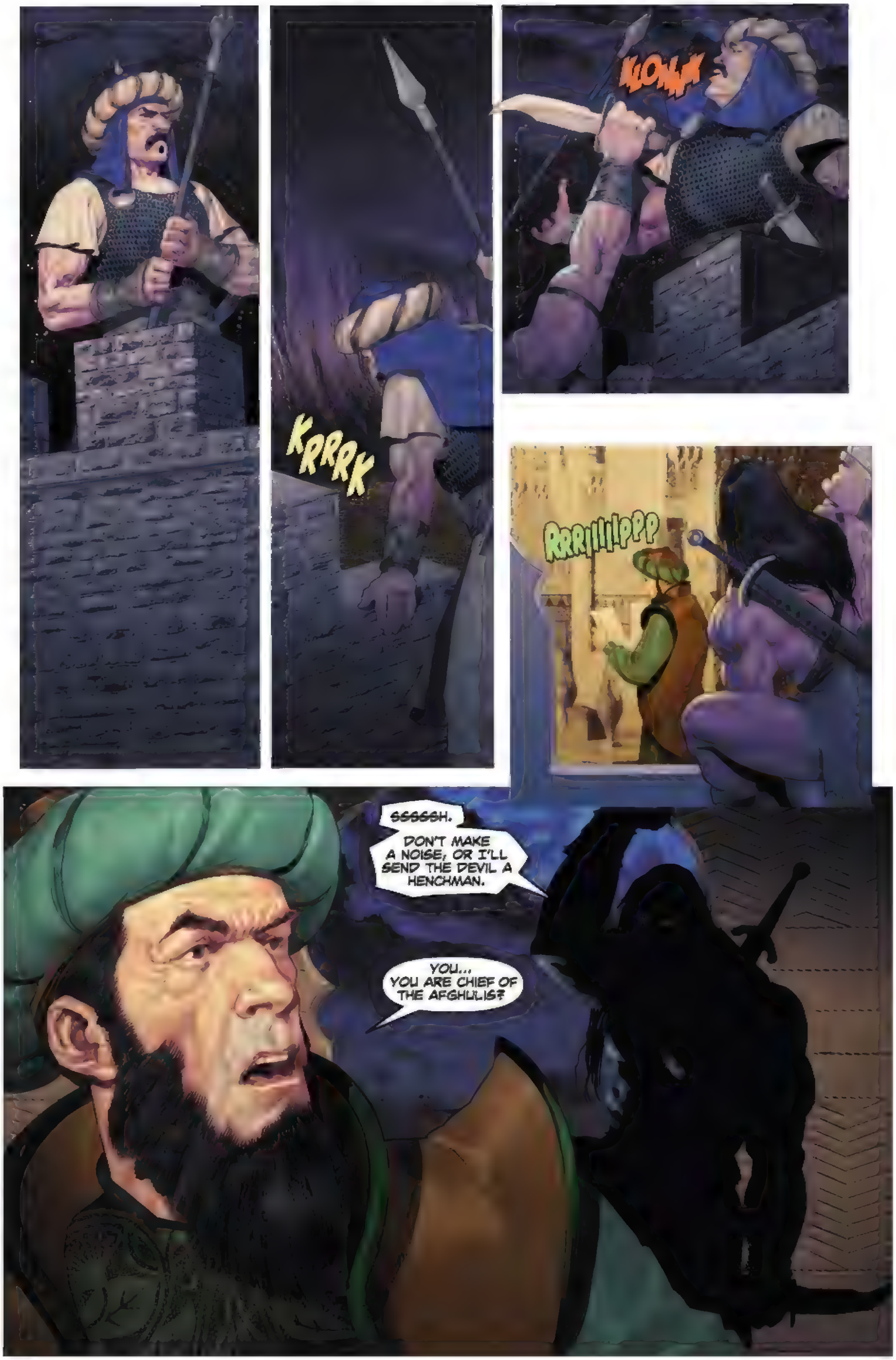
On sale 23 October from Dark Horse

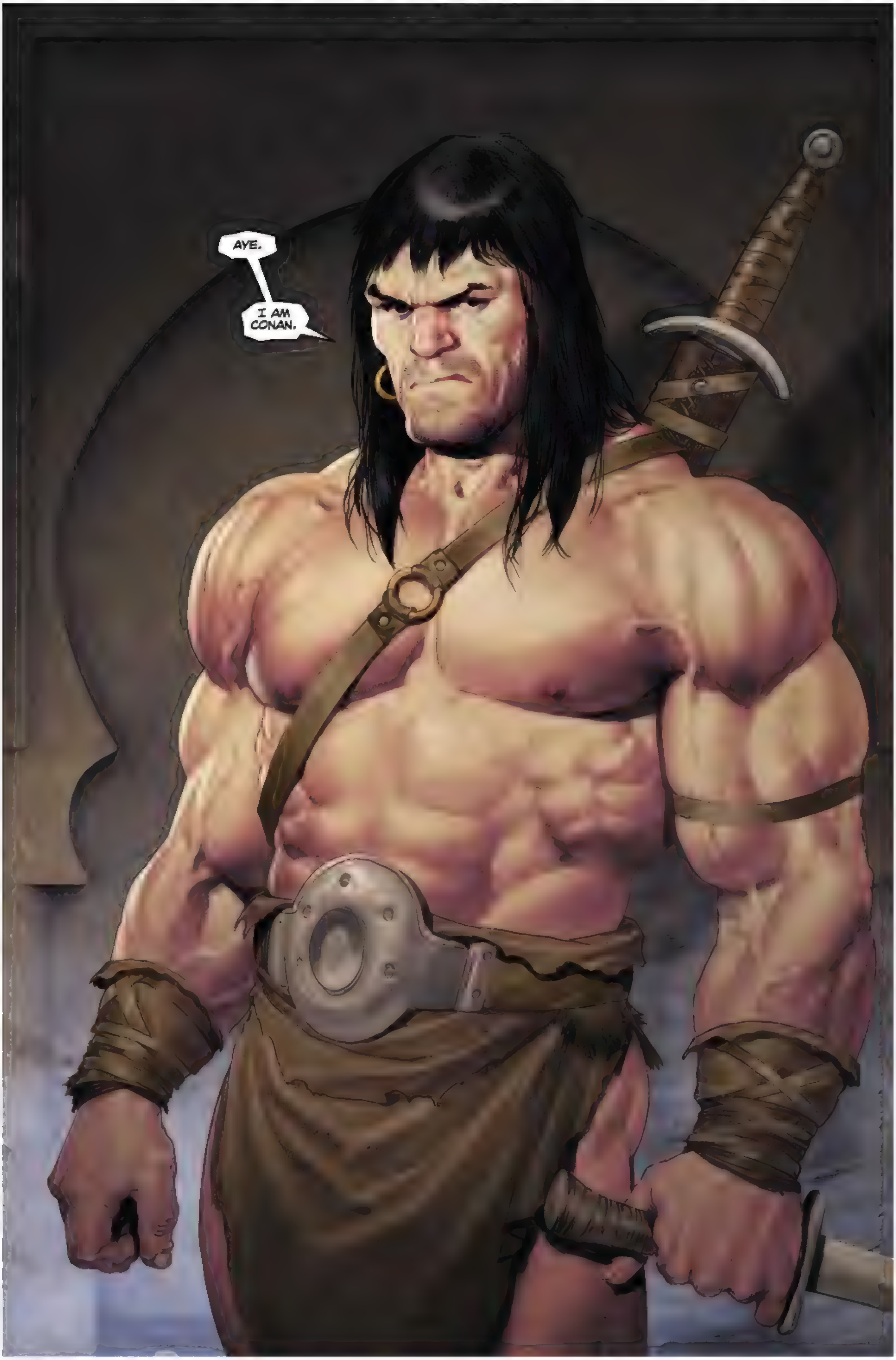
All pages © Dark Horse

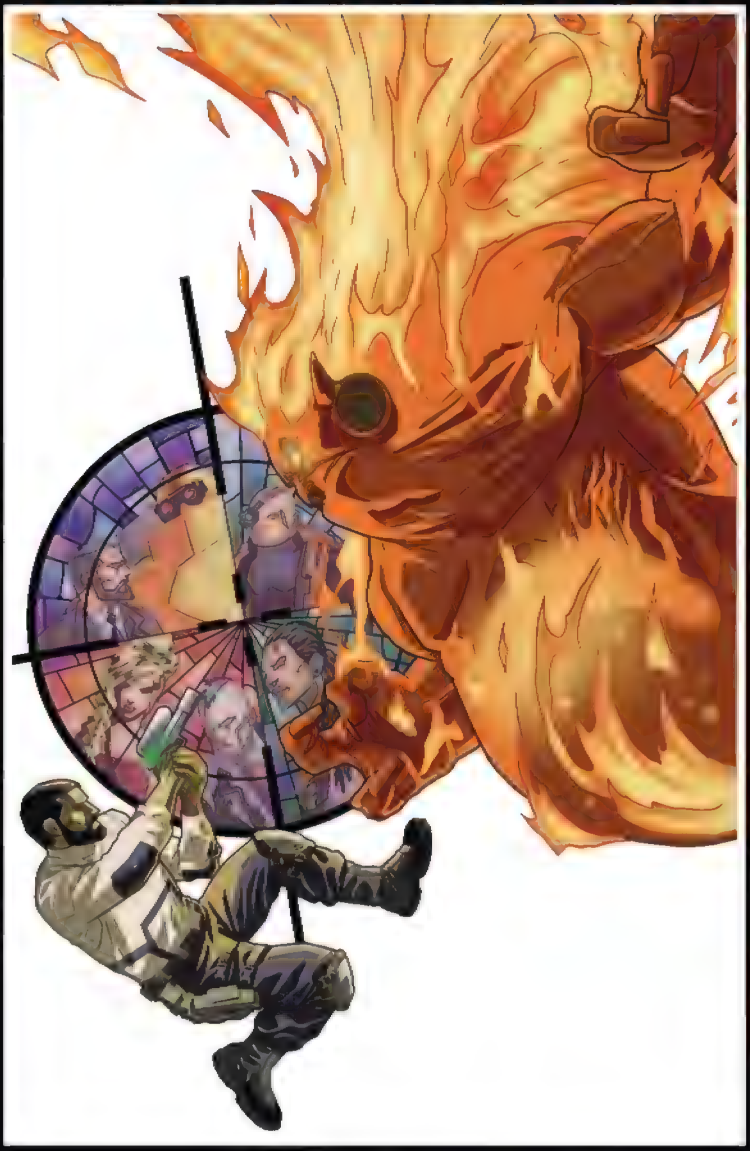

"I DO NOT UNDERSTAND.
"WHEN I CHANCED TO CAPTURE THESE SEVEN HILLMEN *STEALING CATTLE*, I REPORTED THEIR CAPTURE TO THE WAZAM, AS IS THE CUSTOM.
"BUT THEN, BEFORE I COULD HANG THEM, THERE CAME AN ORDER TO HOLD THEM AND COMMUNICATE WITH THEIR CHIEF.
"THIS I DID, BUT THE MAN HOLDS ALOOF, AS I HAVE SAID.
"THESE MEN ARE OF THE TRIBE OF AFGHULIS, BUT HE IS A FOREIGNER FROM THE WEST."
I HAVE THREATENED TO HANG THEM TOMORROW AT DAWN, IF HE DOES NOT COME.
GOOD! YOU HAVE DONE WELL. AND I WILL TELL YOU WHY I HAVE GIVEN THESE ORDERS.


MY BROTHER... THE KING OF VENDHYA WAS DESTROYED BY MAGIC. I HAVE DEVOTED MY LIFE TO THE DESTRUCTION OF HIS MURDERERS.
AS HE DIED HE GAVE ME A CLUE, AND I HAVE FOLLOWED IT.
"I HAVE READ THE BOOK OF SKELOS...
"...AND TALKED WITH NAMELESS HERMITS IN THE CAVES BELOW JHELAI. I LEARNED HOW, AND BY WHOM, HE WAS DESTROYED.
"HIS ENEMIES WERE THE BLACK SEERS OF MOUNT YIMSHA."
ASURA!
DO YOU FEAR THEM?
WHO DOES NOT, YOUR MAJESTY? BUT THE SAGES SAY THAT THEY SELDOM INTERFERE IN THE LIVES OF MORTAL MEN.
WHY THEY SLEW MY BROTHER I DO NOT KNOW. BUT I HAVE SWORN ON THE ALTAR OF ASURA TO DESTROY THEM!
AND SO I MUST CONTROL MEN ACROSS THE BORDER, MEN WHO KNOW THE WAY TO MOUNT YIMSHA--
BUT THE TRIBES FEAR THE BLACK SEERS AND SHUN THE UNHOLY MOUNTAIN.


SO I HAVE BEEN TOLD. THEREFORE HE IS THE MAN I MUST DEAL WITH.
HE WISHES THE RELEASE OF HIS SEVEN MEN.
VERY WELL; THEIR RANSOM SHALL BE THE HEADS OF THE BLACK SEERS!
DOES THE CHIEF OF THE AFGHULIS FEAR THEM?
WELL, AS TO THAT...
...I DOUBT IF THERE IS *ANYTHING* THAT DEVIL FEARS.
IT SHALL BE AS YOU WISH, YOUR MAJESTY.
I CANNOT PREDICT WHAT THE CHIEF'S ACTION WILL BE.
THE TRIBESMEN ARE ALWAYS TURBULENT, AND I HAVE REASON TO BELIEVE THAT EMISSARIES FROM THE TURANIANS ARE STIRRING THEM UP TO RAID OUR BORDERS.
AS YOUR MAJESTY KNOWS, KING YEZDIGERD HAS LONG LOOKED SOUTHWARD WITH GREEDY LUST AND PERHAPS IS SEEKING TO GAIN BY TREACHERY WHAT HE COULD NOT WIN BY ARMS.
I HAVE THOUGHT THAT THIS FOREIGN CHIEFTAIN MIGHT WELL BE ONE OF HIS SPIES.
WE SHALL SEE. IF HE LOVES HIS FOLLOWERS, HE WILL BE AT THE GATES AT DAWN, TO PARLEY.
I SHALL SPEND THE NIGHT IN THE FORTRESS. BESIDES MY PEOPLE, ONLY YOU KNOW OF MY PRESENCE HERE.
PRAY TO ASURA FOR SUCCESS IN THE MORNING, GOVERNOR SHAN. SLEEP WELL.


KLONK
KRRRK
RRRIIIIIPPP
SSSSSH.
DON'T MAKE A NOISE, OR I'LL SEND THE DEVIL A HENCHMAN.
YOU... YOU ARE CHIEF OF THE AFGHULIS?


AYE.
I AM CONAN.



SHOOT First

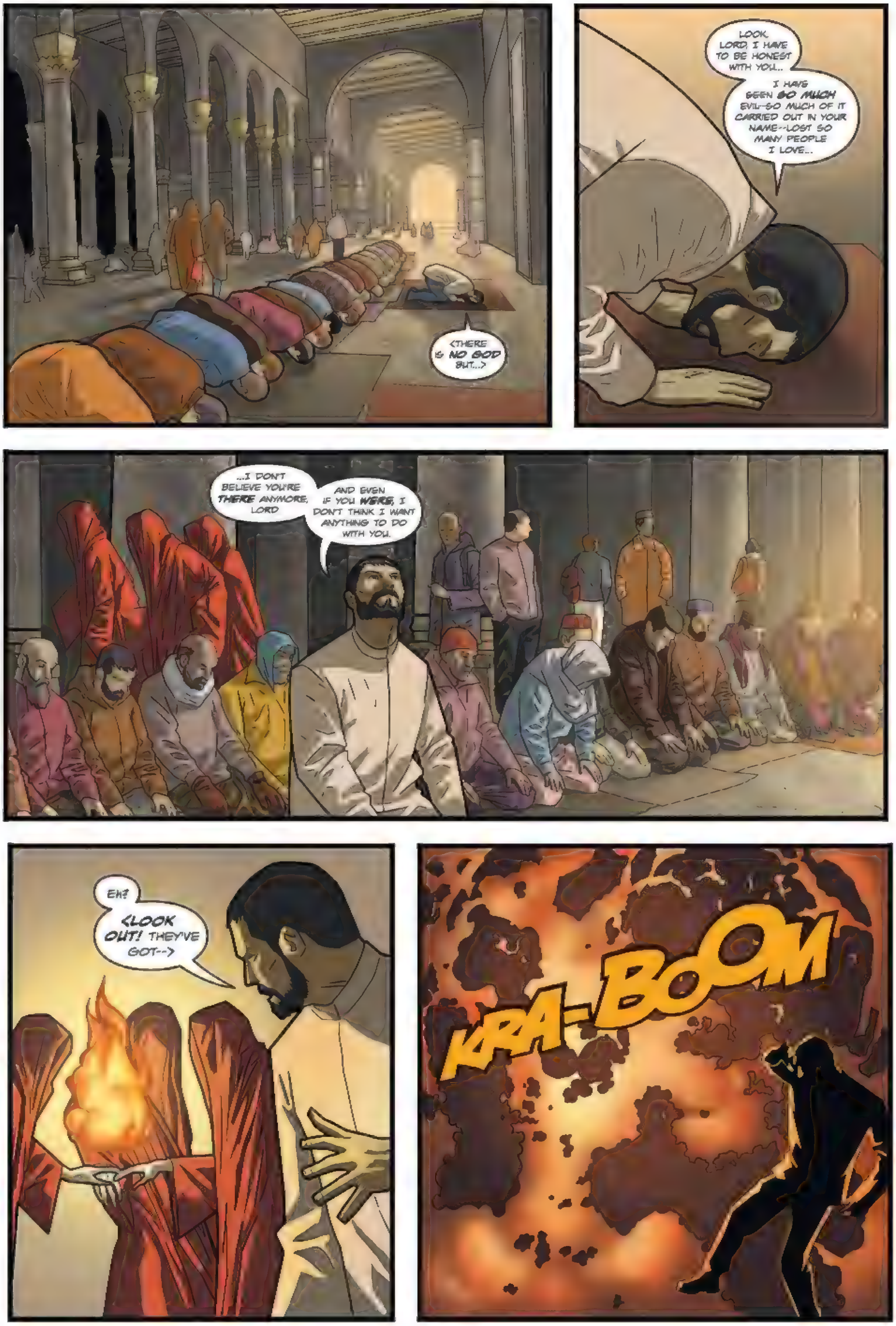
Writer: **Justin Aclin**

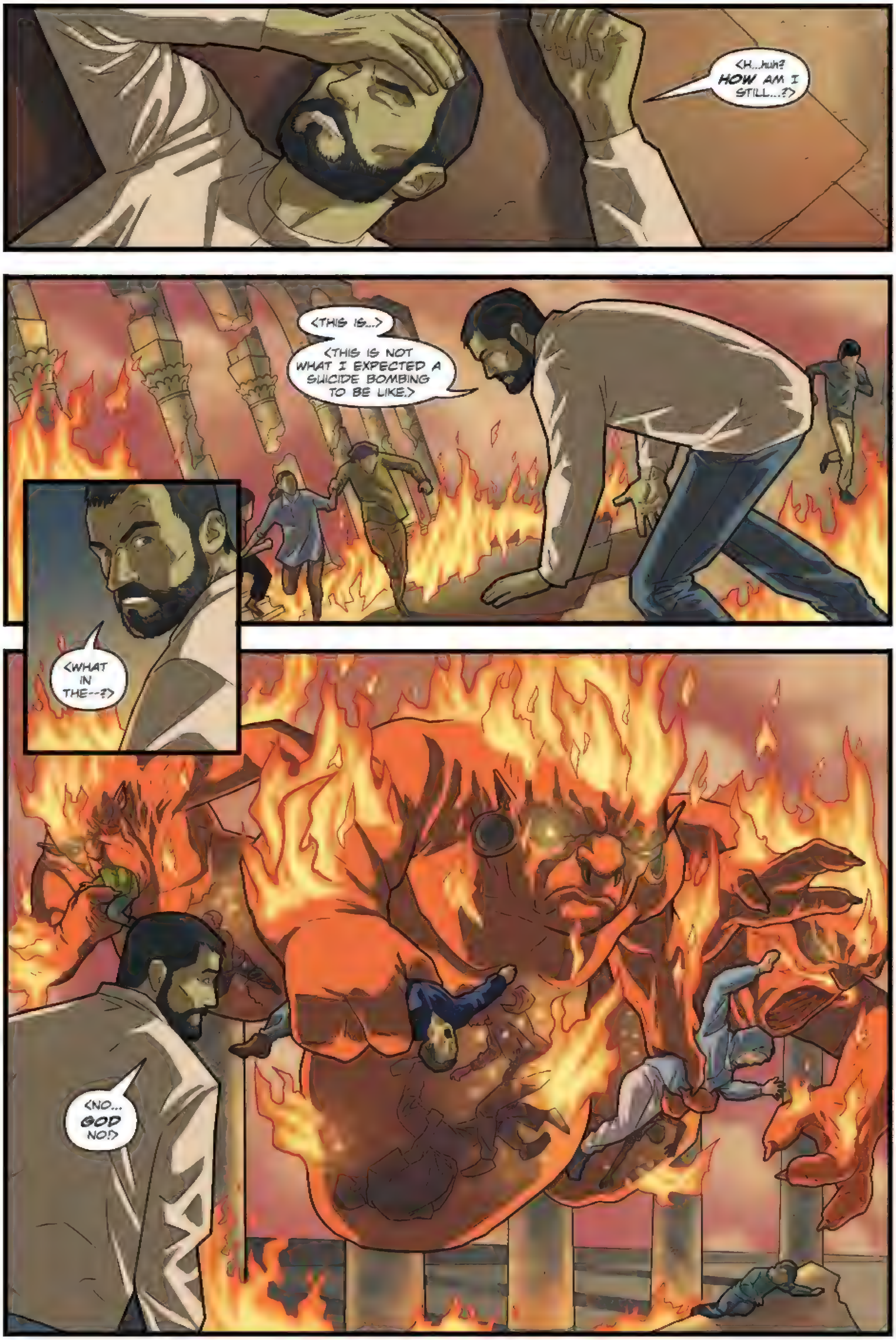
Artist: **Nicolás Daniel Selma**

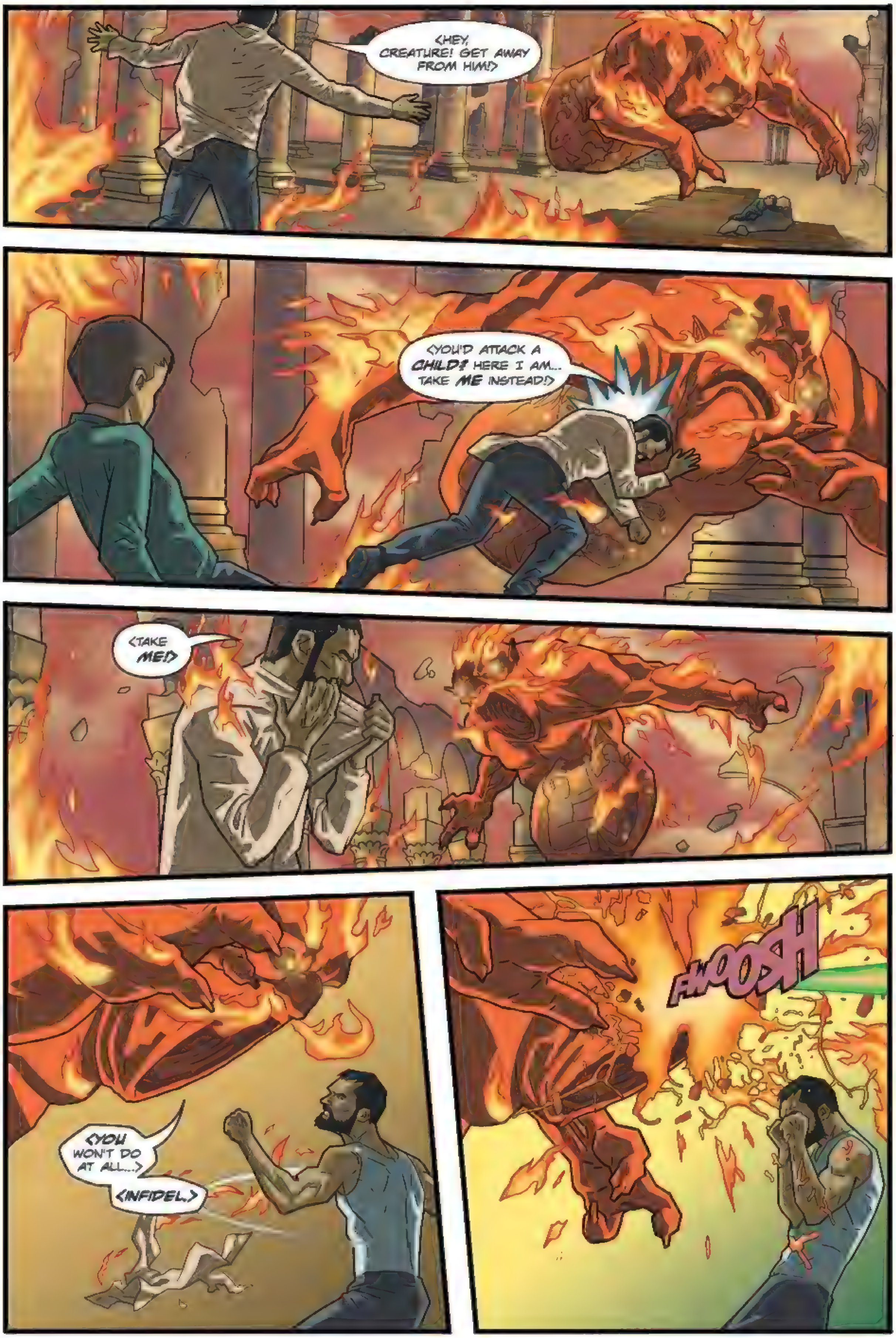
Meet the Secular Humanist Occult Obliteration Taskforce – defending humanity from angels, demons, and a bunch of other crap SHOOT doesn't believe in.

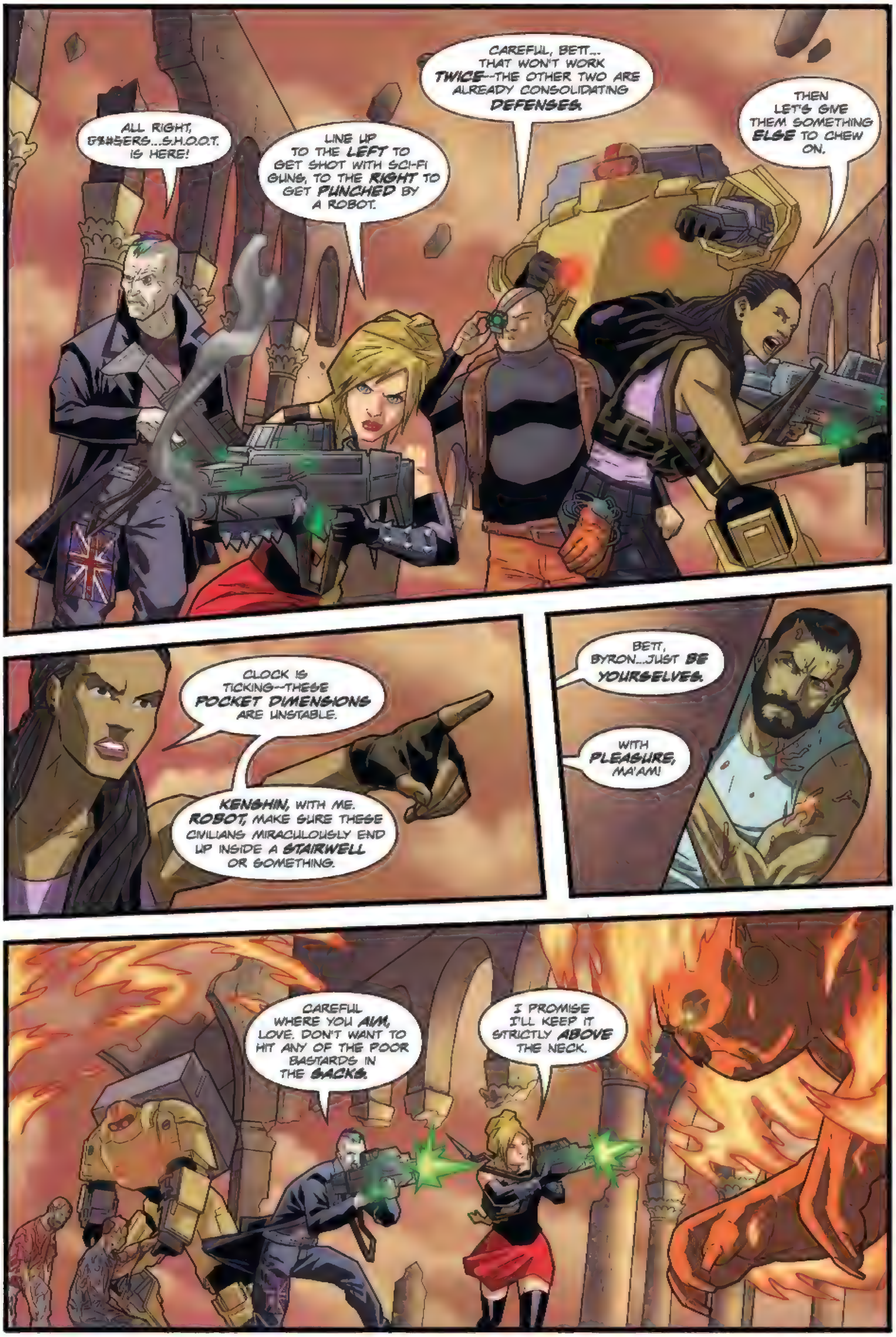
On sale now from Dark Horse

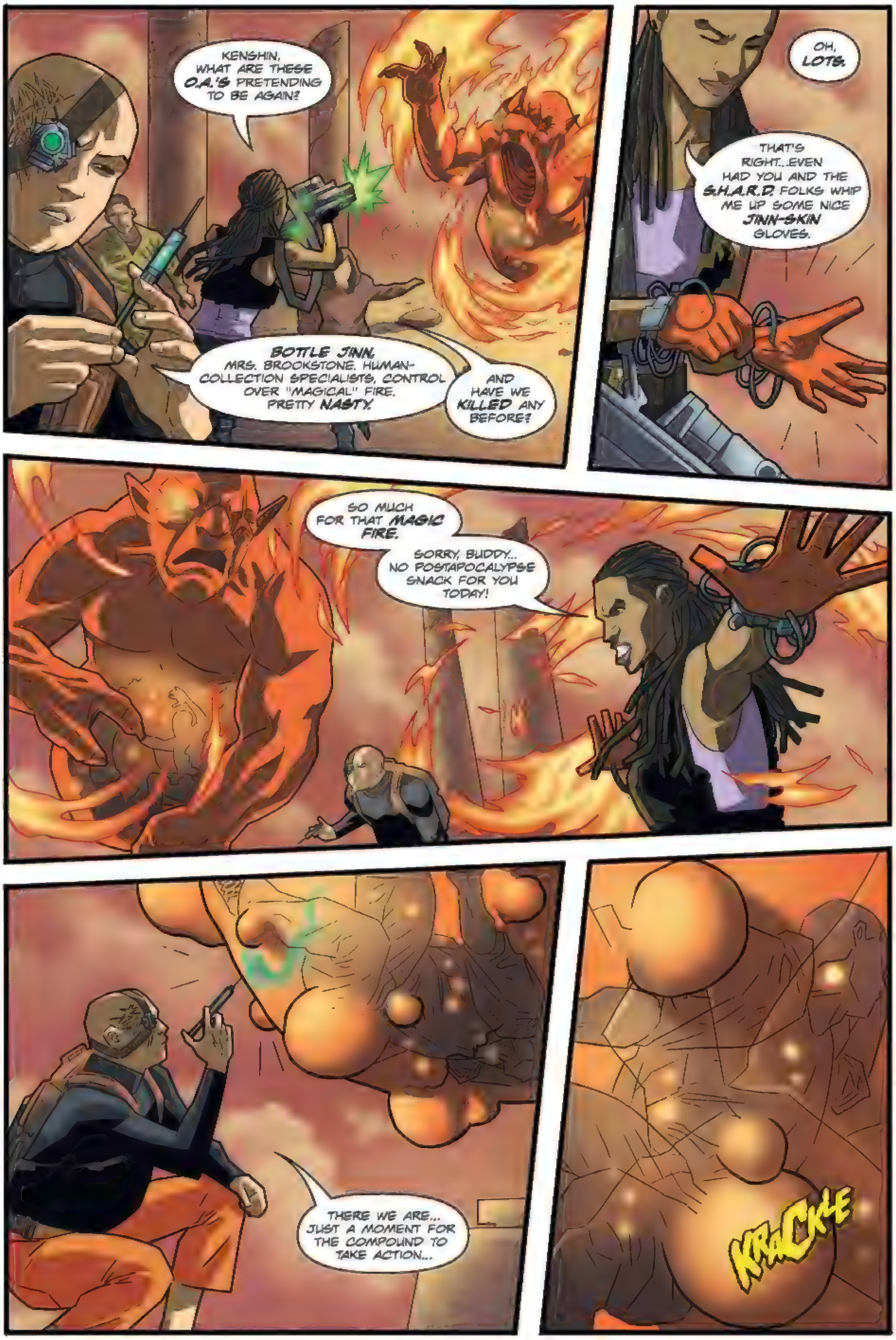
All pages © Dark Horse

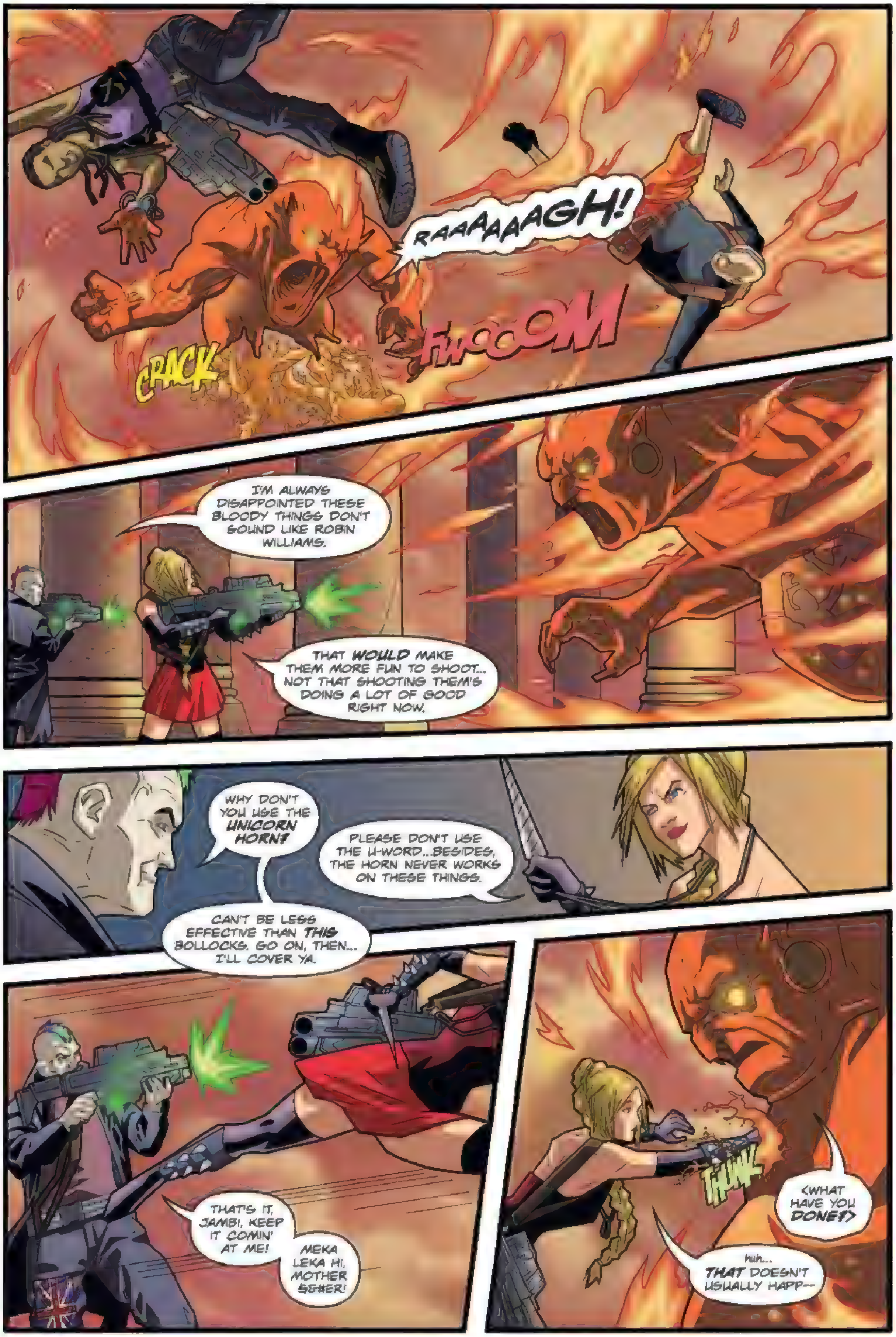

<THERE IS NO GOD BUT...>
LOOK, LORD, I HAVE TO BE HONEST WITH YOU...
I HAVE SEEN SO MUCH EVIL--SO MUCH OF IT CARRIED OUT IN YOUR NAME--LOST SO MANY PEOPLE I LOVE...
...I DON'T BELIEVE YOU'RE THERE ANYMORE, LORD
AND EVEN IF YOU WERE, I DON'T THINK I WANT ANYTHING TO DO WITH YOU.
EH?
<LOOK OUT! THEY'VE GOT-->
KRA-BOOM




<HEY, CREATURE! GET AWAY FROM HIM!>
<YOU'D ATTACK A CHILD? HERE I AM... TAKE ME INSTEAD!>
<TAKE ME!>
<YOU WON'T DO AT ALL...>
<INFIDEL.>
FWOOSH


ALL RIGHT, G$#$ERS...S.H.O.O.T. IS HERE!
LINE UP TO THE *LEFT* TO GET SHOT WITH SCI-FI GUNS, TO THE *RIGHT* TO GET *PUNCHED* BY A ROBOT.
CAREFUL, BETT... THAT WON'T WORK *TWICE*--THE OTHER TWO ARE ALREADY CONSOLIDATING *DEFENSES.*
THEN LET'S GIVE THEM SOMETHING *ELSE* TO CHEW ON.
CLOCK IS TICKING--THESE *POCKET DIMENSIONS* ARE UNSTABLE.
KENSHIN, WITH ME. *ROBOT,* MAKE SURE THESE CIVILIANS MIRACULOUSLY END UP INSIDE A *STAIRWELL* OR SOMETHING.
BETT, BYRON...JUST *BE YOURSELVES.*
WITH *PLEASURE,* MA'AM!
CAREFUL WHERE YOU *AIM,* LOVE. DON'T WANT TO HIT ANY OF THE POOR BASTARDS IN THE *SACKS.*
I PROMISE I'LL KEEP IT STRICTLY *ABOVE* THE NECK.


KENSHIN, WHAT ARE THESE O.A.'S PRETENDING TO BE AGAIN?
BOTTLE JINN, MRS. BROOKSTONE. HUMAN-COLLECTION SPECIALISTS, CONTROL OVER "MAGICAL" FIRE. PRETTY NASTY.
AND HAVE WE KILLED ANY BEFORE?
OH, LOTS.
THAT'S RIGHT...EVEN HAD YOU AND THE S.H.A.R.D. FOLKS WHIP ME UP SOME NICE JINN-SKIN GLOVES.
SO MUCH FOR THAT MAGIC FIRE.
SORRY, BUDDY... NO POSTAPOCALYPSE SNACK FOR YOU TODAY!
THERE WE ARE... JUST A MOMENT FOR THE COMPOUND TO TAKE ACTION...
KRACKLE


RAAAAAAGH!
FWOOOM
CRACK
I'M ALWAYS DISAPPOINTED THESE BLOODY THINGS DON'T SOUND LIKE ROBIN WILLIAMS.
THAT **WOULD** MAKE THEM MORE FUN TO SHOOT... NOT THAT SHOOTING THEM'S DOING A LOT OF GOOD RIGHT NOW.
WHY DON'T YOU USE THE **UNICORN HORN?**
PLEASE DON'T USE THE U-WORD... BESIDES, THE HORN NEVER WORKS ON THESE THINGS.
CAN'T BE LESS EFFECTIVE THAN **THIS** BOLLOCKS. GO ON, THEN... I'LL COVER YA.
THAT'S IT, JAMBI, KEEP IT COMIN' AT ME!
MEKA LEKA HI, MOTHER $&#ER!
THUNK
<WHAT HAVE YOU **DONE?**>
huh... **THAT** DOESN'T USUALLY HAPP--

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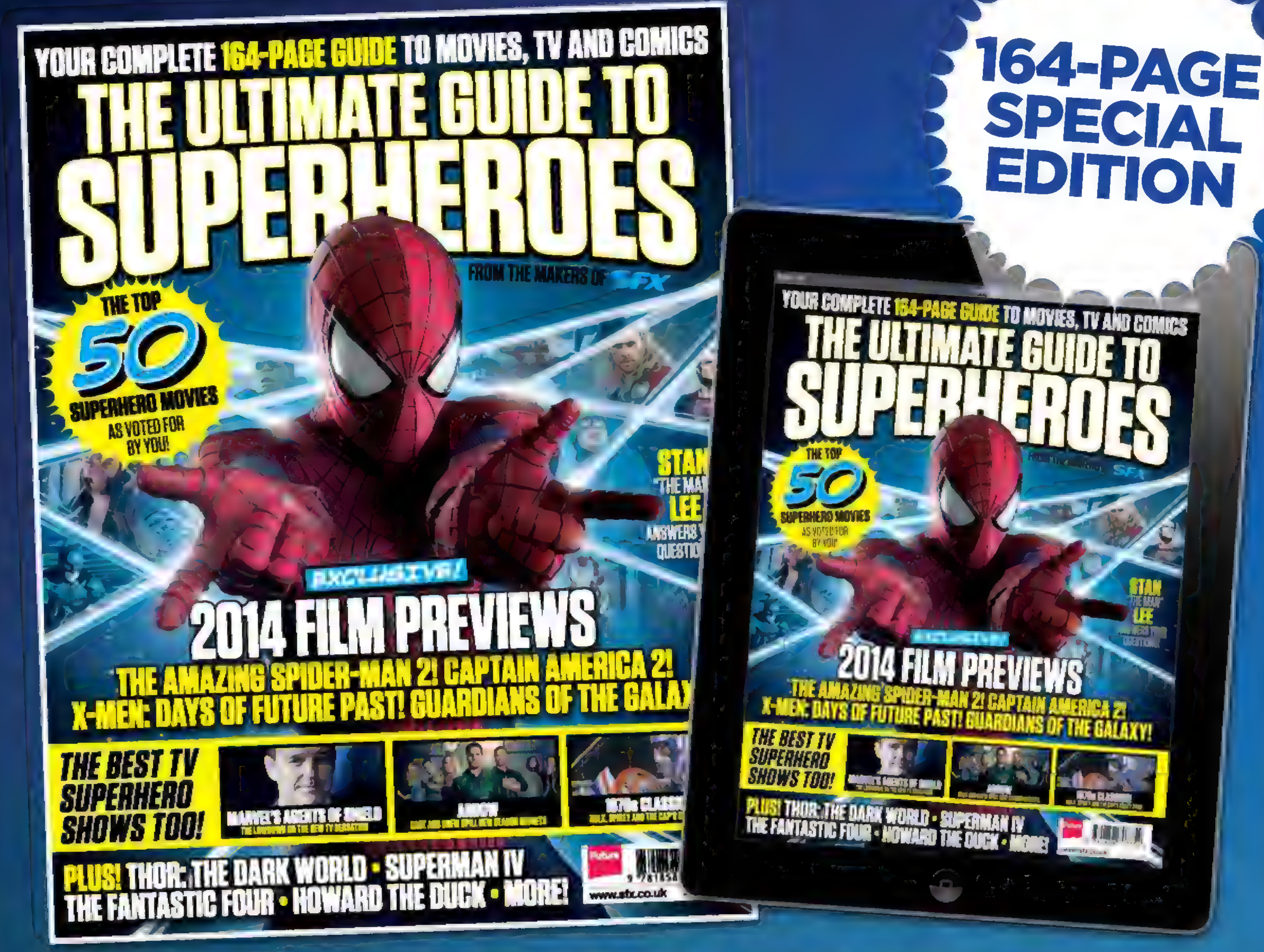
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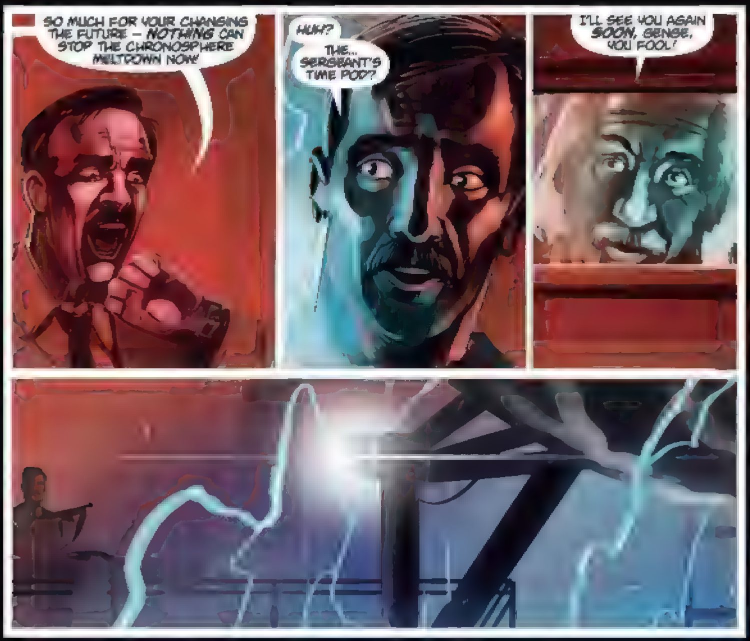

SO MUCH FOR YOUR CHANGING THE FUTURE – *NOTHING* CAN STOP THE CHRONOSPHERE MELTDOWN NOW!
HUH?
THE... SERGEANT'S TIME POD?
I'LL SEE YOU AGAIN *SOON*, GENSE, YOU FOOL!

Chronos Commandos #5

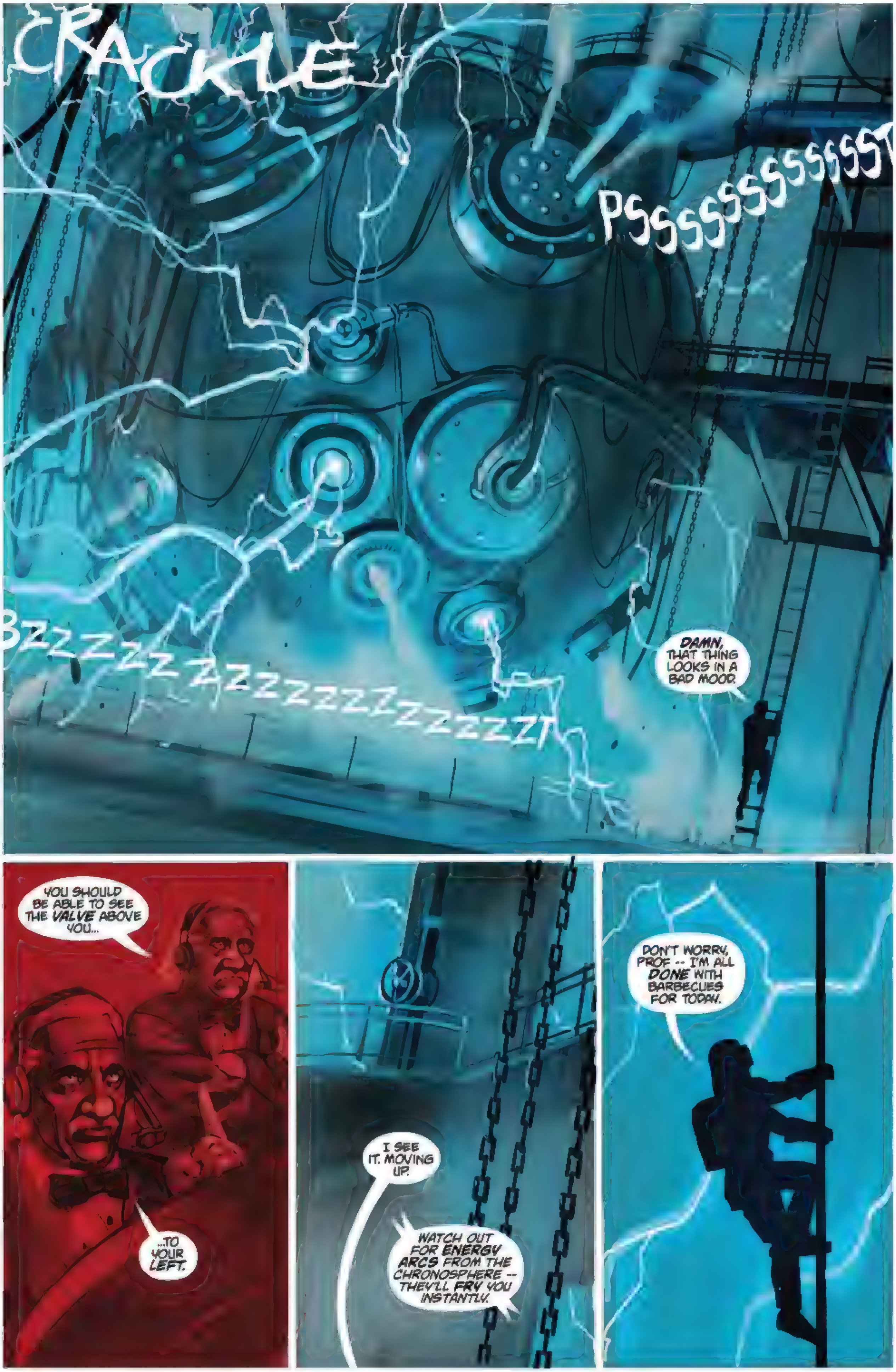
Writer: Stuart Jennett

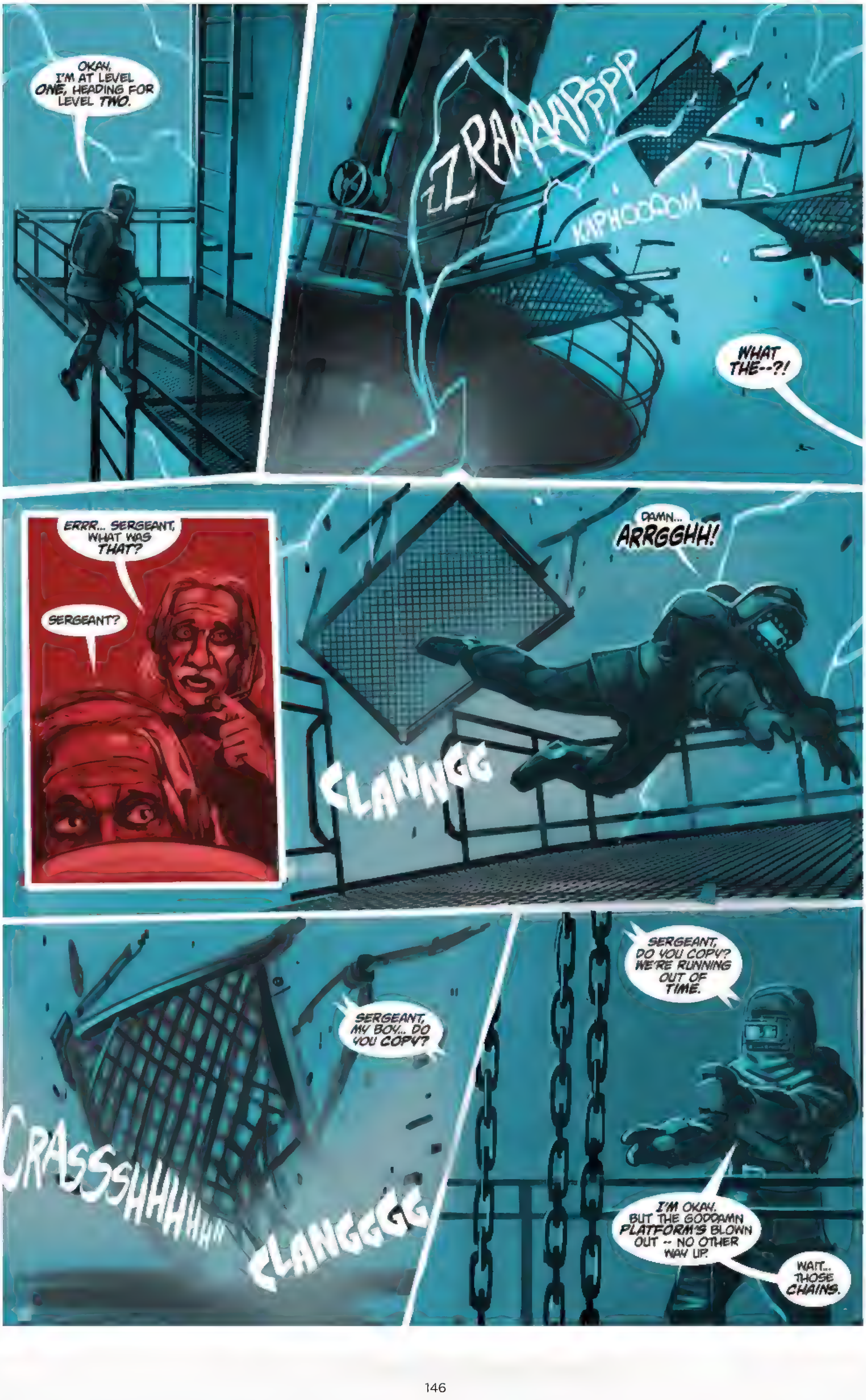
Artist: Stuart Jennett

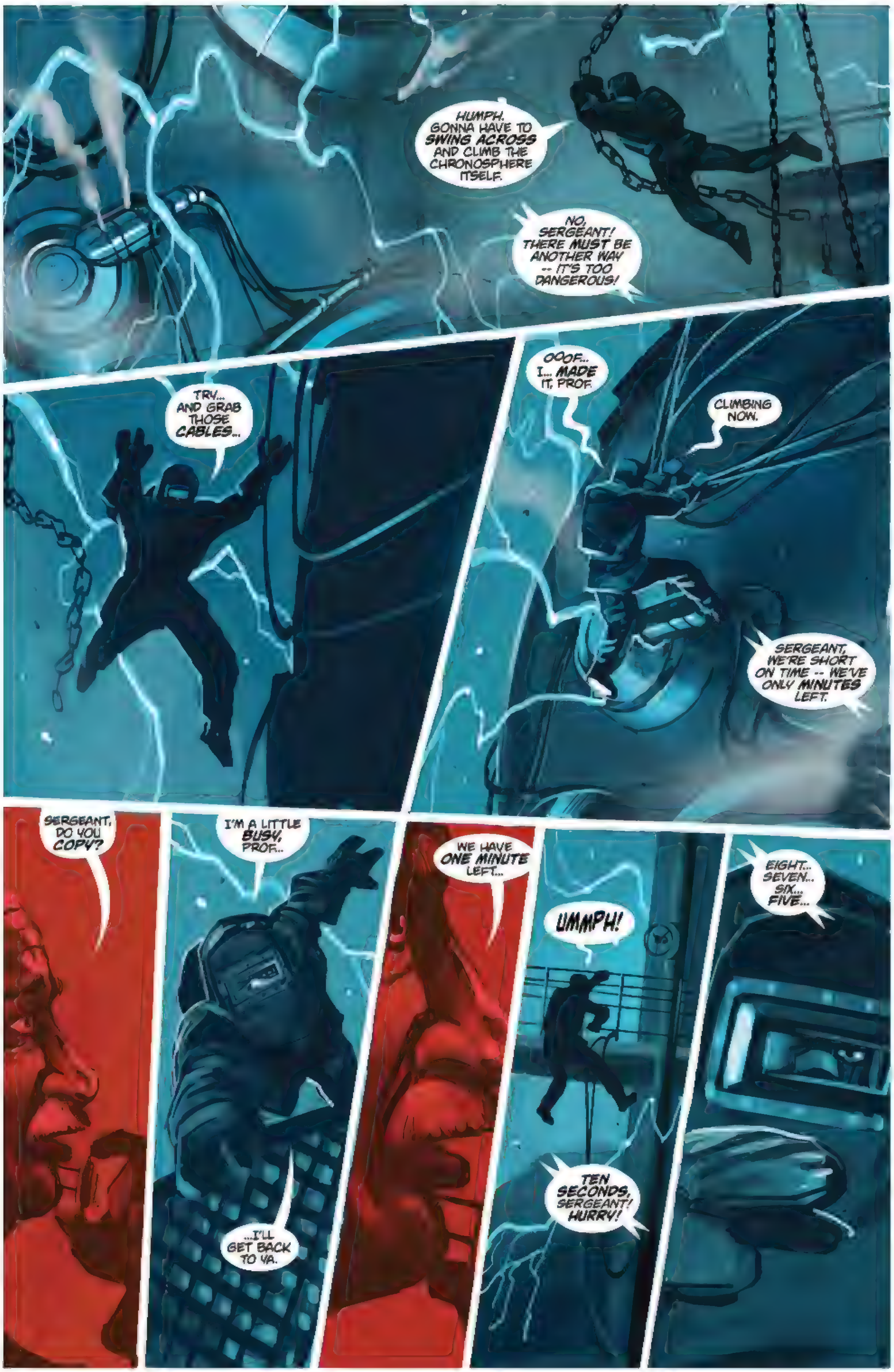
It's the slam-bang conclusion of the first *Chronos Commandos* miniseries, as the Sarge and his Nazi nemesis, Richter, beat the crap outta each other for the stolen Chronosphere core – and only one of them is making it home! Guest starring: Einstein

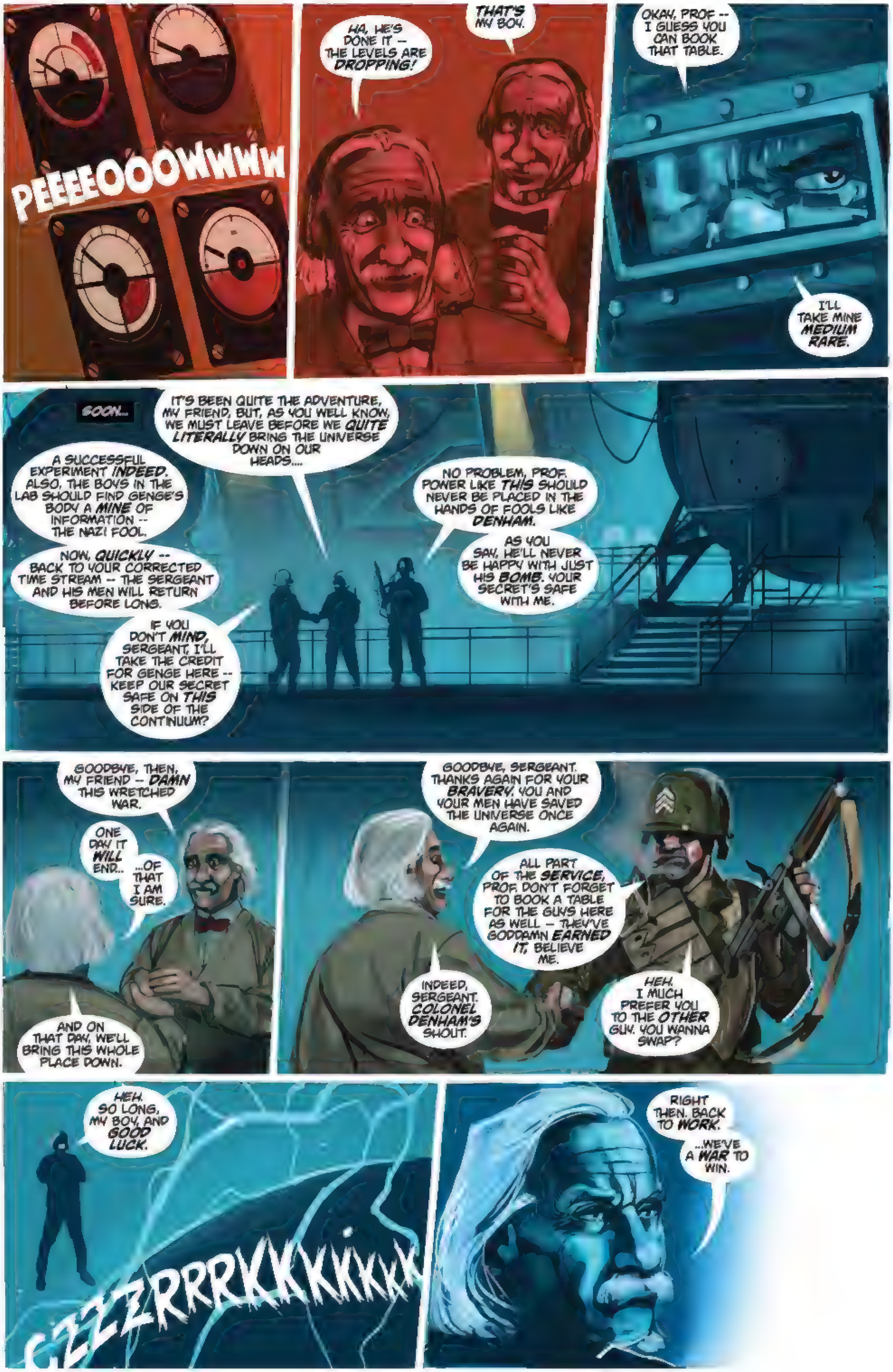
On sale 13 November from Titan Comics

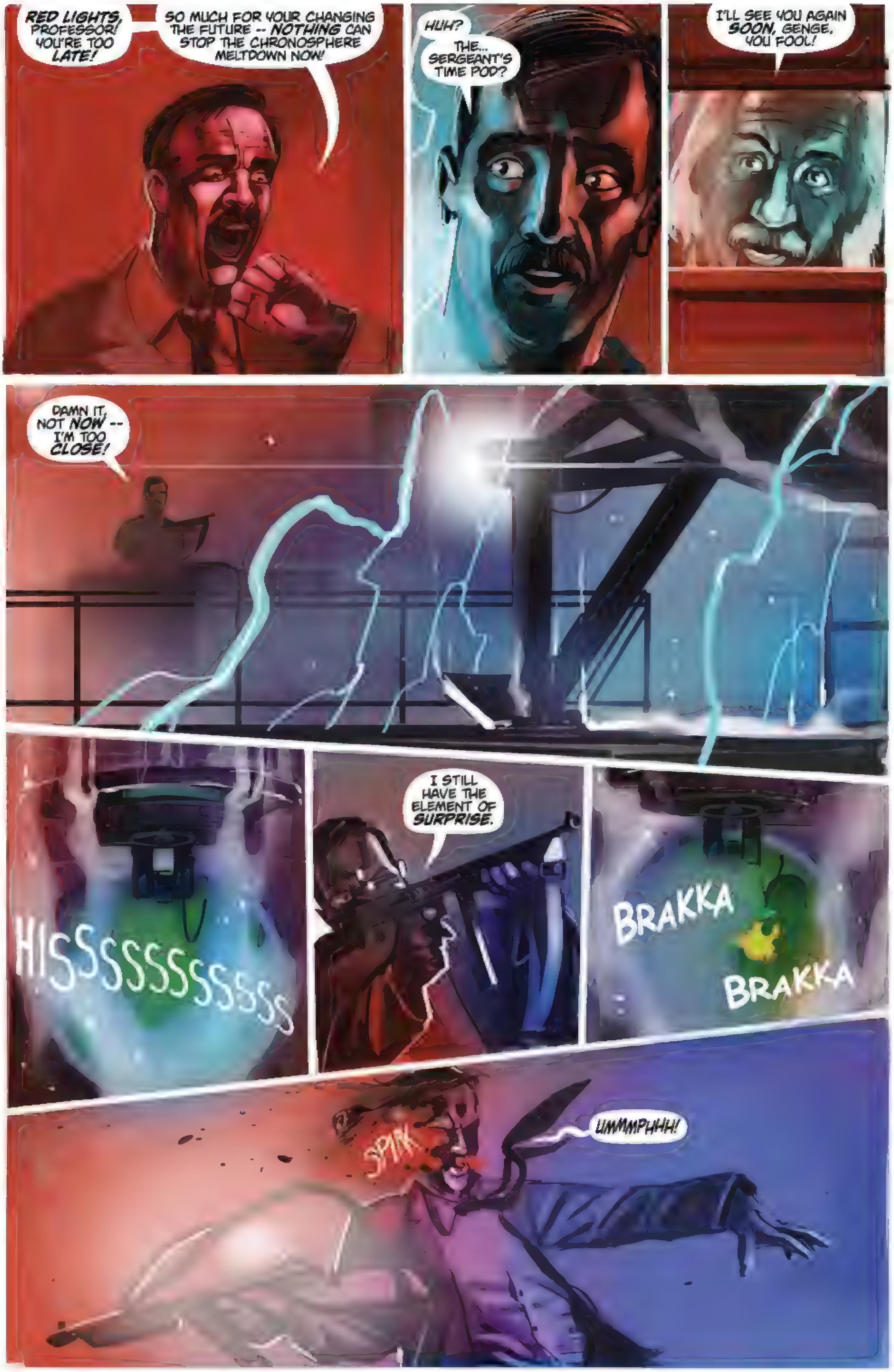
All pages © Titan Comics

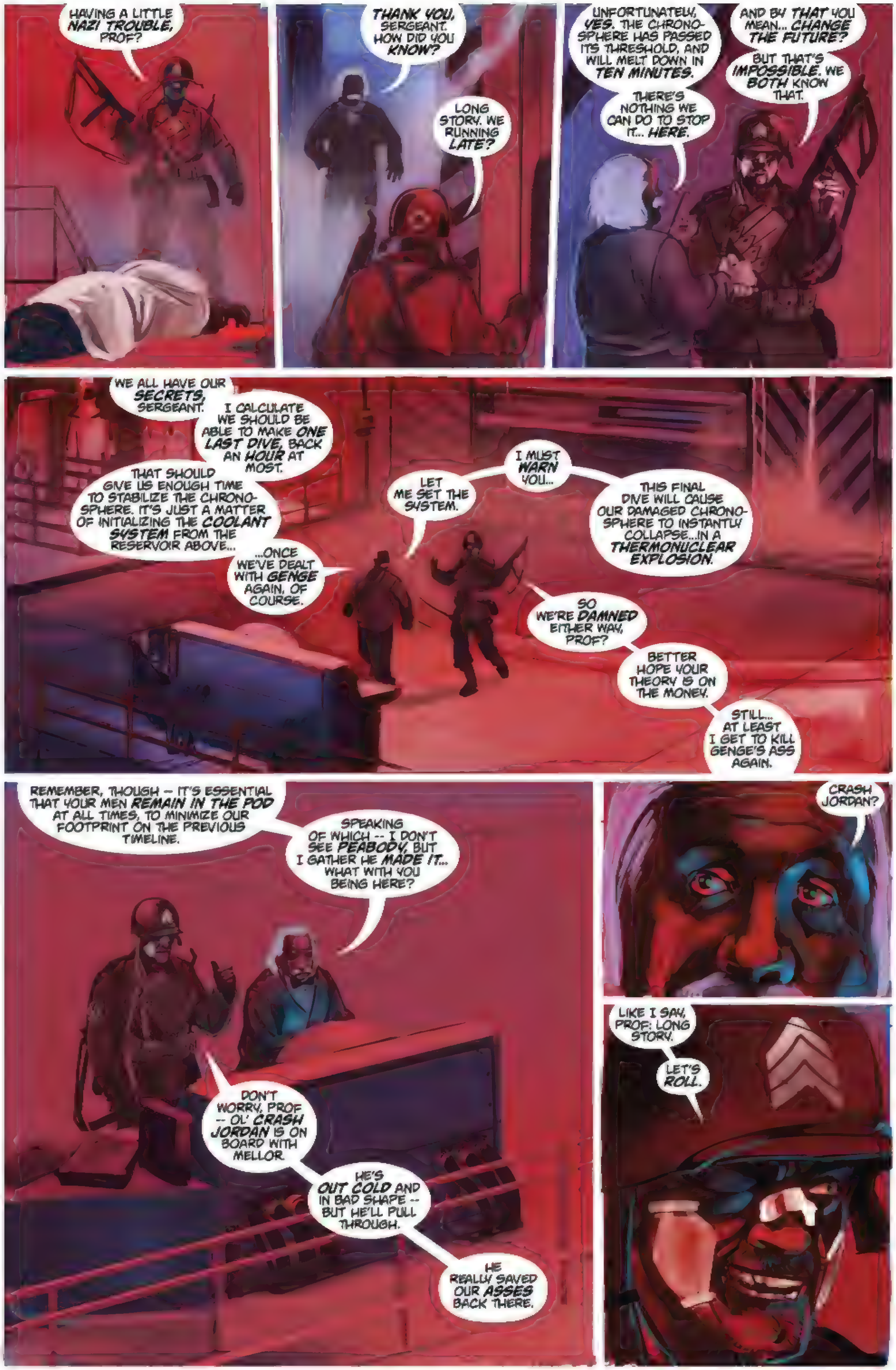

CRACKLE
PSSSSSSSSSSSST
BZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZT
DAMN, THAT THING LOOKS IN A BAD MOOD.
YOU SHOULD BE ABLE TO SEE THE VALVE ABOVE YOU...
...TO YOUR LEFT.
I SEE IT. MOVING UP.
WATCH OUT FOR ENERGY ARCS FROM THE CHRONOSPHERE -- THEY'LL FRY YOU INSTANTLY.
DON'T WORRY, PROF -- I'M ALL DONE WITH BARBECUES FOR TODAY.


OKAY, I'M AT LEVEL ONE, HEADING FOR LEVEL TWO.
ZZRAAAAPPPP
KAPHOOOOM
WHAT THE--?!
ERRR... SERGEANT, WHAT WAS THAT?
SERGEANT?
DAMN... ARRGGHH!
CLANNGG
CRASSSHHHHH
CLANGGGG
SERGEANT, MY BOY... DO YOU COPY?
SERGEANT, DO YOU COPY? WE'RE RUNNING OUT OF TIME.
I'M OKAY. BUT THE GODDAMN PLATFORM'S BLOWN OUT -- NO OTHER WAY UP.
WAIT... THOSE CHAINS.


HUMPH. GONNA HAVE TO SWING ACROSS AND CLIMB THE CHRONOSPHERE ITSELF.
NO, SERGEANT! THERE MUST BE ANOTHER WAY -- IT'S TOO DANGEROUS!
TRY... AND GRAB THOSE CABLES...
OOOF... I... MADE IT, PROF.
CLIMBING NOW.
SERGEANT, WE'RE SHORT ON TIME -- WE'VE ONLY MINUTES LEFT.
SERGEANT, DO YOU COPY?
I'M A LITTLE BUSY, PROF...
...I'LL GET BACK TO YA.
WE HAVE ONE MINUTE LEFT...
UMMPH!
TEN SECONDS, SERGEANT! HURRY!
EIGHT... SEVEN... SIX... FIVE...


PEEEEOOOWWWW
HA, HE'S DONE IT -- THE LEVELS ARE DROPPING!
THAT'S MY BOY.
OKAY, PROF -- I GUESS YOU CAN BOOK THAT TABLE.
I'LL TAKE MINE MEDIUM RARE.
SOON...
IT'S BEEN QUITE THE ADVENTURE, MY FRIEND, BUT, AS YOU WELL KNOW, WE MUST LEAVE BEFORE WE QUITE LITERALLY BRING THE UNIVERSE DOWN ON OUR HEADS....
A SUCCESSFUL EXPERIMENT INDEED. ALSO, THE BOYS IN THE LAB SHOULD FIND GENGE'S BODY A MINE OF INFORMATION -- THE NAZI FOOL.
NO PROBLEM, PROF. POWER LIKE THIS SHOULD NEVER BE PLACED IN THE HANDS OF FOOLS LIKE DENHAM.
AS YOU SAY, HE'LL NEVER BE HAPPY WITH JUST HIS BOMB. YOUR SECRET'S SAFE WITH ME.
NOW, QUICKLY -- BACK TO YOUR CORRECTED TIME STREAM -- THE SERGEANT AND HIS MEN WILL RETURN BEFORE LONG.
IF YOU DON'T MIND, SERGEANT, I'LL TAKE THE CREDIT FOR GENGE HERE -- KEEP OUR SECRET SAFE ON THIS SIDE OF THE CONTINUUM?
GOODBYE, THEN, MY FRIEND -- DAMN THIS WRETCHED WAR.
ONE DAY IT WILL END...
...OF THAT I AM SURE.
AND ON THAT DAY, WE'LL BRING THIS WHOLE PLACE DOWN.
GOODBYE, SERGEANT. THANKS AGAIN FOR YOUR BRAVERY. YOU AND YOUR MEN HAVE SAVED THE UNIVERSE ONCE AGAIN.
ALL PART OF THE SERVICE, PROF. DON'T FORGET TO BOOK A TABLE FOR THE GUYS HERE AS WELL -- THEY'VE GODDAMN EARNED IT, BELIEVE ME.
INDEED, SERGEANT. COLONEL DENHAM'S SHOUT.
HEH. I MUCH PREFER YOU TO THE OTHER GUY. YOU WANNA SWAP?
HEH. SO LONG, MY BOY, AND GOOD LUCK.
GZZZRRRKKKKKKK
RIGHT THEN. BACK TO WORK.
...WE'VE A WAR TO WIN.


RED LIGHTS, PROFESSOR! YOU'RE TOO LATE!
SO MUCH FOR YOUR CHANGING THE FUTURE -- NOTHING CAN STOP THE CHRONOSPHERE MELTDOWN NOW!
HUH?
THE... SERGEANT'S TIME POD?
I'LL SEE YOU AGAIN SOON, GENGE, YOU FOOL!
DAMN IT, NOT NOW -- I'M TOO CLOSE!
HISSSSSSSSSSSS
I STILL HAVE THE ELEMENT OF SURPRISE.
BRAKKA
BRAKKA
SPAK
UMMMPHHH!


HAVING A LITTLE *NAZI TROUBLE,* PROF?
THANK YOU, SERGEANT. HOW DID YOU *KNOW?*
LONG STORY. WE RUNNING *LATE?*
UNFORTUNATELY, *YES.* THE CHRONOSPHERE HAS PASSED ITS THRESHOLD, AND WILL MELT DOWN IN *TEN MINUTES.*
THERE'S NOTHING WE CAN DO TO STOP IT... *HERE.*
AND BY *THAT* YOU MEAN... *CHANGE THE FUTURE?*
BUT THAT'S *IMPOSSIBLE.* WE *BOTH* KNOW THAT.
WE ALL HAVE OUR *SECRETS,* SERGEANT.
I CALCULATE WE SHOULD BE ABLE TO MAKE *ONE LAST DIVE,* BACK AN *HOUR* AT MOST.
THAT SHOULD GIVE US ENOUGH TIME TO STABILIZE THE CHRONOSPHERE. IT'S JUST A MATTER OF INITIALIZING THE *COOLANT SYSTEM* FROM THE RESERVOIR ABOVE...
...ONCE WE'VE DEALT WITH *GENGE* AGAIN, OF COURSE.
LET ME SET THE SYSTEM.
I MUST *WARN* YOU...
THIS FINAL DIVE WILL CAUSE OUR DAMAGED CHRONOSPHERE TO INSTANTLY COLLAPSE...IN A *THERMONUCLEAR EXPLOSION.*
SO WE'RE *DAMNED* EITHER WAY, PROF?
BETTER HOPE YOUR THEORY IS ON THE MONEY.
STILL... AT LEAST I GET TO KILL GENGE'S ASS AGAIN.
REMEMBER, THOUGH -- IT'S ESSENTIAL THAT YOUR MEN *REMAIN IN THE POD* AT ALL TIMES, TO MINIMIZE OUR FOOTPRINT ON THE PREVIOUS TIMELINE.
SPEAKING OF WHICH -- I DON'T SEE *PEABODY,* BUT I GATHER HE *MADE IT...* WHAT WITH YOU BEING HERE?
DON'T WORRY, PROF -- OL' *CRASH JORDAN* IS ON BOARD WITH MELLOR.
HE'S *OUT COLD* AND IN BAD SHAPE -- BUT HE'LL PULL THROUGH.
HE REALLY SAVED OUR *ASSES* BACK THERE.
CRASH JORDAN?
LIKE I SAY, PROF: LONG STORY.
LET'S *ROLL.*

TOP SECRET

THWAK!
CLASSIFIED

CLASSIFIED
CLASSIFIED
CLASSIFIED

LISTEN VERY CAREFULLY, VE SHALL SAY ZIS ONLY VONCE…

COMIC HEROES #22 GOES SUPER-SPY CRAZY!

The top secret history of SHIELD blown wide open!

PLUS! Captain America: The Winter Soldier We have the ultimate briefing session

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IN SHOPS &
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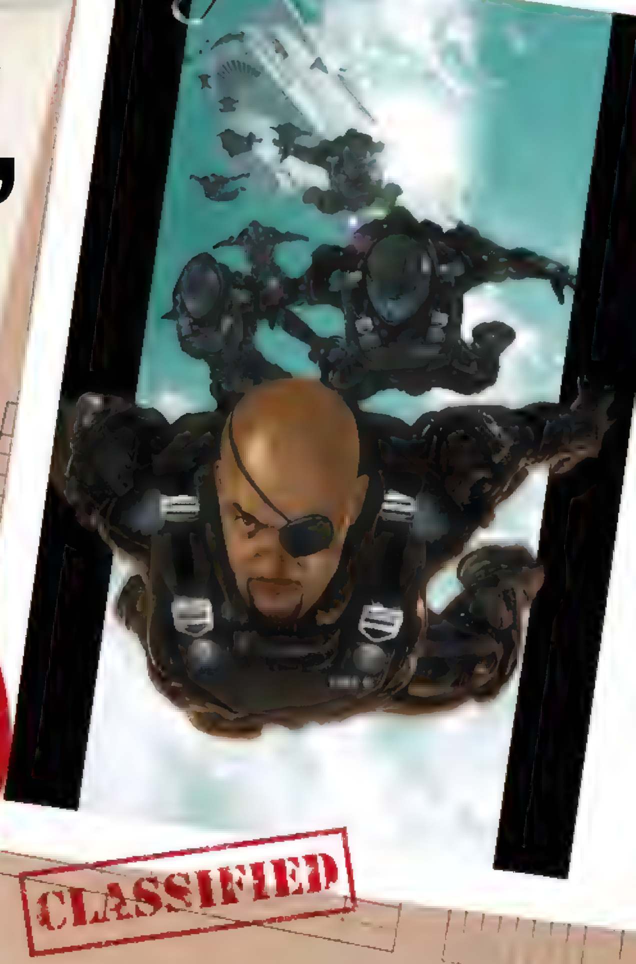
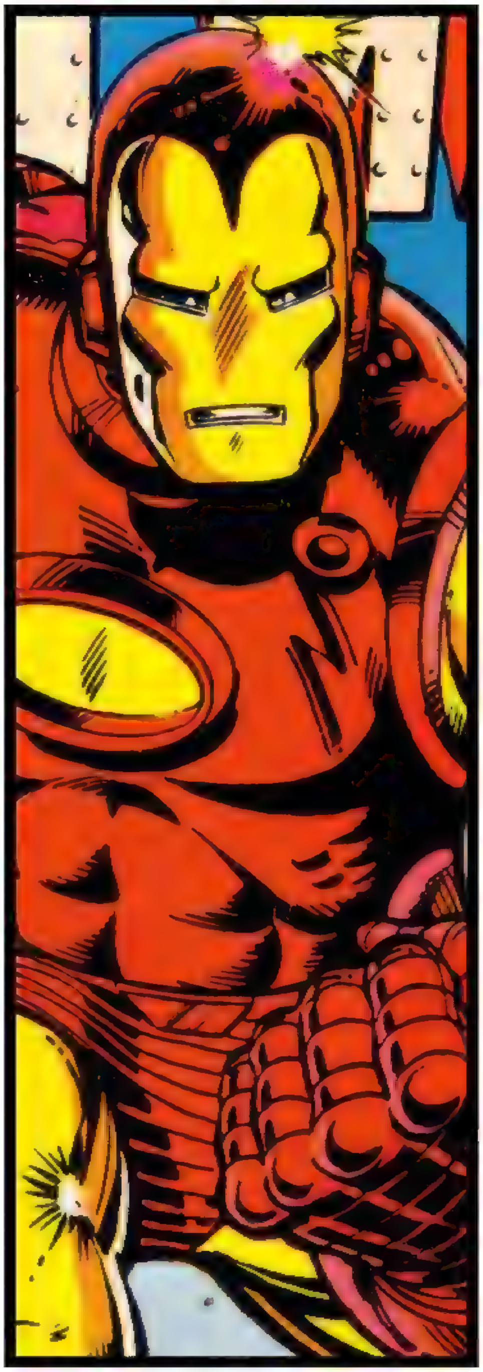

CLASSIFIED

World's Finest

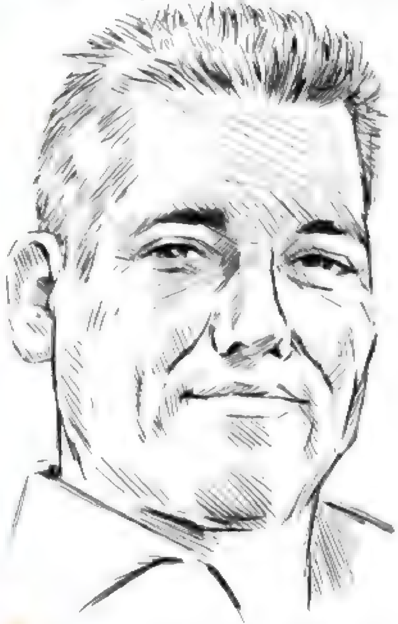
In conversation with the comic book legends...

Bob Layton



The mettle behind Iron Man

Words by David Currie



“My first rule of thumb – have fun doing comics”

Bob Layton is a comics polymath, equally adept at writing, drawing, inking and editing them over a long and eventful career. He has redefined major characters and helped to build publishing empires, learning his craft at the shoulders of the legends of the industry, and influencing the generation that followed him.

He's celebrated as the definitive *Iron Man* artist of the '70s and '80s, due, in no small part, to his visual redefinition of the Iron Man suit – he drew it so it looked as if it was actually made from metal. Sounds simple enough, but it proved to be a seismic shift in the character's development, eventually leading to the super-sleek, technology-driven, box

T AVENGE THE
OCENT MAN!
IRC
FOU

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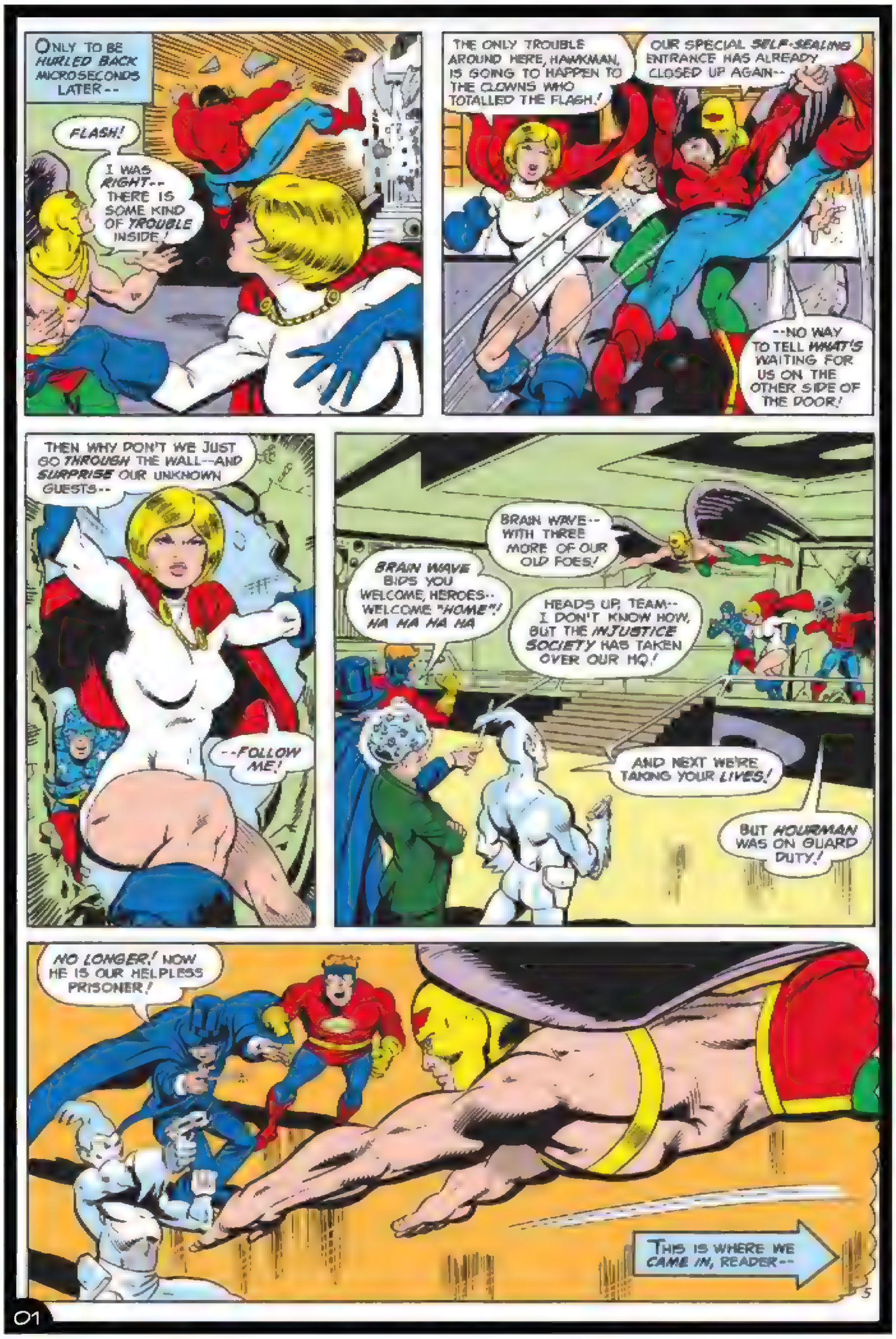
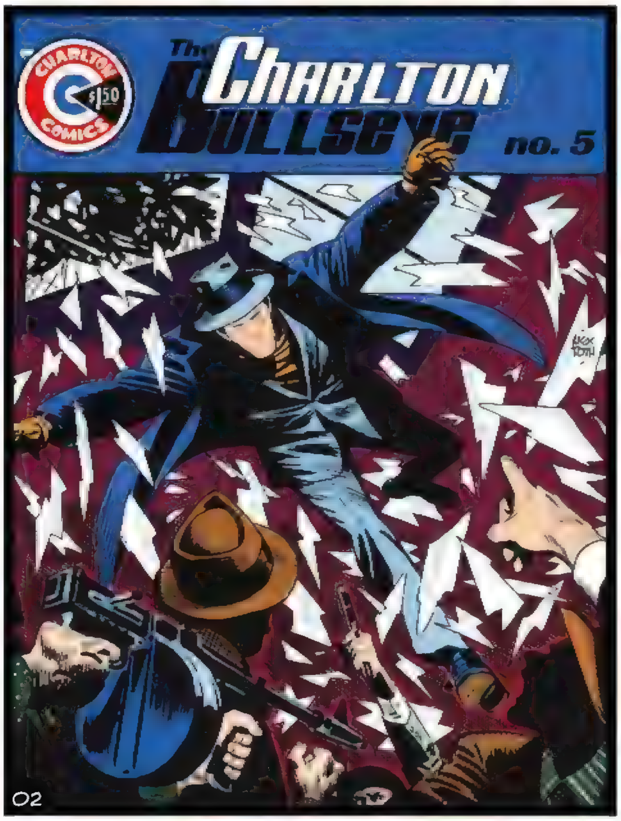

ONLY TO BE *HURLED BACK* MICROSECONDS LATER--
FLASH!
I WAS *RIGHT*-- THERE IS SOME KIND OF *TROUBLE* INSIDE!
THE ONLY TROUBLE AROUND HERE, HAWKMAN, IS GOING TO HAPPEN TO THE CLOWNS WHO TOTALLED THE FLASH!
OUR SPECIAL *SELF-SEALING* ENTRANCE HAS ALREADY CLOSED UP AGAIN--
--NO WAY TO TELL *WHAT'S* WAITING FOR US ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE DOOR!
THEN WHY DON'T WE JUST GO *THROUGH* THE WALL--AND *SURPRISE* OUR UNKNOWN GUESTS--
--*FOLLOW ME!*
BRAIN WAVE-- WITH THREE MORE OF OUR OLD FOES!
BRAIN WAVE BIDS YOU WELCOME, HEROES-- WELCOME *"HOME"*! *HA HA HA HA*
HEADS UP, TEAM-- I DON'T KNOW HOW, BUT THE *INJUSTICE SOCIETY* HAS TAKEN OVER OUR HQ!
AND NEXT WE'RE TAKING YOUR *LIVES!*
BUT *HOURMAN* WAS ON GUARD DUTY!
NO LONGER! NOW HE IS OUR HELPLESS PRISONER!
THIS IS WHERE WE *CAME IN*, READER--
5
01

01 ***All-Star Comics* #66, May 1977**

Layton began working for DC in early 1977, with a regular inking stint on *All-Star Comics*, as well as issues of *DC Super Stars* and *DC Special*.

02 ***Charlton Bullseye* Vol 1 #5, Jul 1976**

Stern and Layton raided DC's vaults for the firm's *The Charlton Bullseye* fanzine. Issue 5 featured a new Question story.


CHARLTON COMICS
$1.50
The CHARLTON BULLSEYE
no. 5
ALEX TOTH
02

office-loved, version of today. In the '90s, he was one of the main architects of the Valiant Comics line – both creatively and at management level – which, at one point, became the third biggest comic book publisher in the US. And he continues to be very active in the industry today.

***Comic Heroes* talked to Bob about his career, its highs and lows, and found a creator with a lot of history to cover, but also one with a sharp memory and an eloquent turn of phrase.**

Bob tells all about Iron Man, explains the real reasons why Valiant collapsed so spectacularly and reveals that he's still as busy as ever…

Comic Heroes: Where do you hail from, Bob?
Bob Layton: "I grew up in Indianapolis, Indiana. That's in the heart of America's Midwest. I learned to read from comics when I was only four years old. I skipped a grade when I entered the school system and wound up graduating High School at barely 17 years old. If that isn't a powerful statement for the power of the medium, I don't know what is! The medium affected me in a manner that changed my life in a positive direction."

CH: So what is your "first comic" memory from childhood?
BL: "My first comic was a *Showcase* issue featuring The Challengers Of The Unknown by Jack Kirby and Wally Wood. I have to say that it made such an impact on me that it set me on my career path. Great art jobs come and go, but what makes a classic is the kind of story that you carry with you from your childhood right into your adult life.

"I started to draw from an early age. I never had a fireman or policeman stage as a child. I wanted to be a storyteller as long as I could remember. I loved the art of Kirby and Wood, also Dick Giordano and Gil Kane. In literary terms, I was influenced by Arthur C Clarke and Edgar Rice Burroughs. I seemed to gravitate towards characters with no inherent superpowers, like the Challengers and Iron Man. Little did I realise that Iron Man would play a huge role in my future."

CH: This passion led you to publish comic fanzines in the early '70s, along with fellow comic creator Roger Stern…
BL: "Yes. I met Roger Stern after High School. He worked for a local radio station in Indianapolis and we began publishing fanzines together. *Contemporary Pictorial Literature* was the name of our main publication. *CPL* turned out to be an extremely popular fan publication for its day and eventually led us into a working alliance with Charlton Comics, with Sterno and me editing and publishing the *Charlton Bullseye* magazine. At that time (mid-'70s) Charlton was struggling to re-establish some sort of footing in the superhero market. Marvel and DC had house fan publications of their own, namely *FOOM* and *Amazing World Of DC Comics*. Charlton wanted to establish a fan presence as well and formed an alliance with the Indy CPL/Gang to produce *Charlton Bullseye*. They gave us access to unpublished material by the likes of Steve Ditko, Jeff Jones and a host of others."

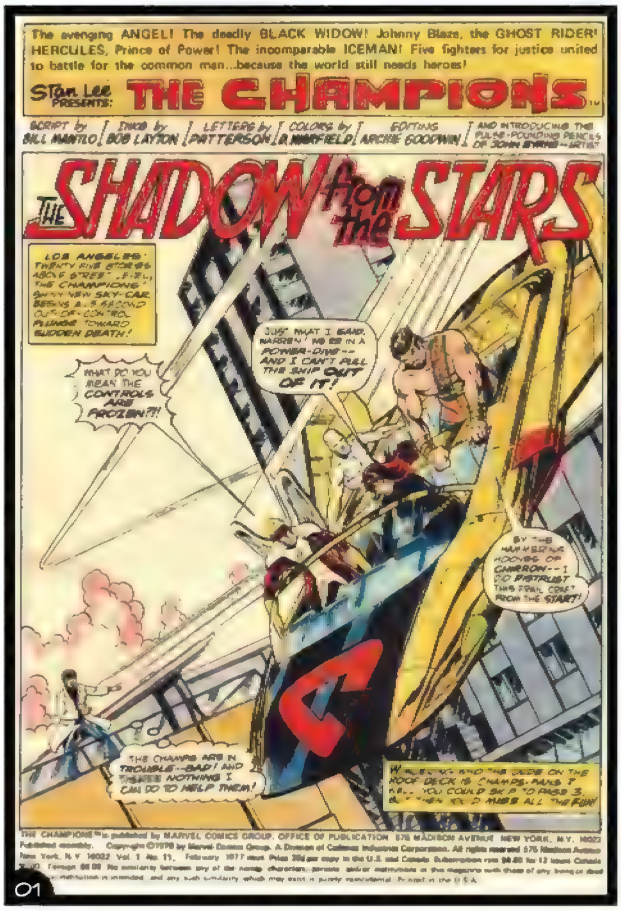
CH: How much unpublished material from artists like Steve Ditko were you given access to?
BL: "We had total access to Charlton's unpublished library of material, as well as the rights to create new stories, like we did with Alex Toth's Question story and the new E-Man adventures. Steve Ditko wasn't working at Charlton at that time, however, he did eventually work with me at Valiant and we had a very friendly and respectful relationship. Many a day, Steve would plop down at my desk and tell me stories about his early Marvel days. At times, it was surreal for that boy from Indiana to be swapping tales with one of the true legends of the comic industry."

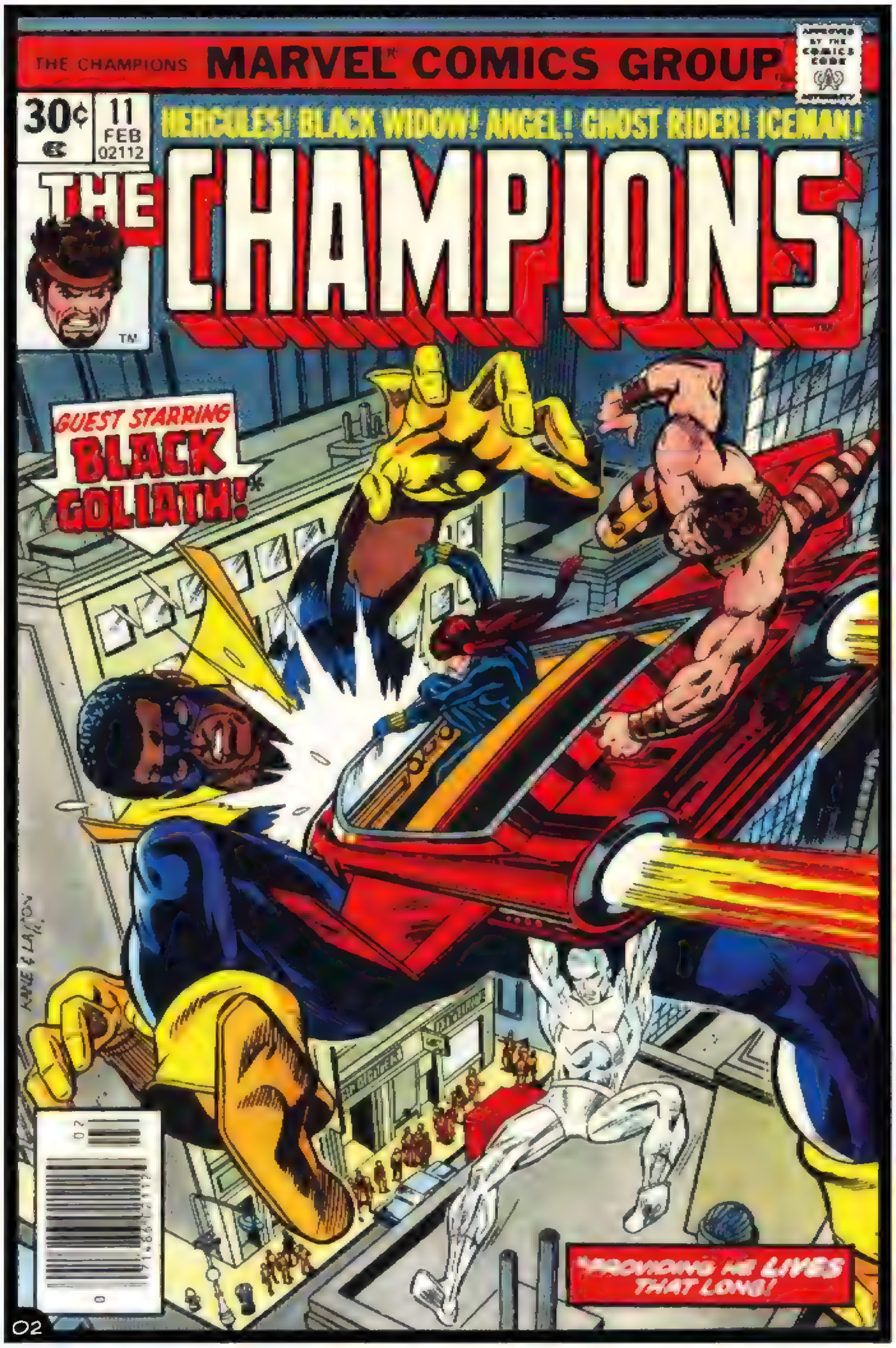
CH: How did your first meeting with the illustrious Wally Wood come about?
BL: "While I was producing *Charlton Bullseye*, I began taking on inking work on their anthology books. But I never actually worked in the Charlton offices. I *did*, however, live about two blocks away from their headquarters in Derby, CT. The close association with Charlton (and their production manager,

»

01&2 ***The Champions*** **#11, Feb 1977, "The Shadow From The Stars"**

The young inker had proved up to the challenge on an overdue *Iron Man* issue, so Marvel's John Romita next gave Layton *The Champions*. Right, Gil Kane's cover pencils, inked by Layton. Below, John Byrne's interior artwork on the same issue, again inked by Layton.


The avenging ANGEL! The deadly BLACK WIDOW! Johnny Blaze, the GHOST RIDER! HERCULES, Prince of Power! The incomparable ICEMAN! Five fighters for justice united to battle for the common man...because the world still needs heroes!
Stan Lee PRESENTS: THE CHAMPIONS
SCRIPT by BILL MANTLO
INKS by BOB LAYTON
LETTERS by PATTERSON
COLORS by B. WARFIELD
EDITING ARCHIE GOODWIN
AND INTRODUCING THE PULSE-POUNDING PENCILS OF JOHN BYRNE--ARTIST
THE SHADOW from the STARS
LOS ANGELES: TWENTY FIVE STORIES ABOVE STREET LEVEL, THE CHAMPIONS' SHINY NEW SKY-CAR BEGINS A 5 SECOND OUT-OF-CONTROL PLUNGE TOWARD SUDDEN DEATH!
JUST WHAT I SAID, WARREN! WE'RE IN A POWER-DIVE--AND I CAN'T PULL THE SHIP OUT OF IT!
WHAT DO YOU MEAN THE CONTROLS ARE FROZEN?!!
BY THE HAMMERING HOOVES OF CHIRRON--I DID DISTRUST THIS FRAIL CRAFT FROM THE START!
THE CHAMPS ARE IN TROUBLE--BAD! AND THERE'S NOTHING I CAN DO TO HELP THEM!
WONDERING WHO THE DUDE ON THE ROOF DECK IS, CHAMPS-FANS? WELL... YOU COULD SKIP TO PAGE 3, BUT THEN YOU'D MISS ALL THE FUN!
01


THE CHAMPIONS
MARVEL COMICS GROUP
APPROVED BY THE COMICS CODE AUTHORITY
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11 FEB 02112
HERCULES! BLACK WIDOW! ANGEL! GHOST RIDER! ICEMAN!
THE CHAMPIONS
GUEST STARRING BLACK GOLIATH!*
KANE & LAYTON
*PROVIDING HE LIVES THAT LONG!
02

Bill Pearson) led to my meeting Wally Wood and becoming one of his apprentices. I always said that Woody could teach a chimpanzee to draw. He was an amazing teacher. Given that he was the co-creator of the very first comic I ever read, it was another surreal moment in my career."

CH: What particular memories do you have of Wally Wood and what was the greatest thing he taught you?

BL: "In the evening, we would sit out on his porch and play guitar together. He was an accomplished folk guitarist and his style was reminiscent of Woody Guthrie and Pete Seeger. The most valuable thing I learned as his apprentice was how to work for reproduction and to utilise black-and-white values to combat the poor colour process of that era. He taught me how to use Zip-A-Tone shading films to create textures and more subtle values. That technique became a huge part of my later success as the artist on *Iron Man*."

CH: The story goes that you got your first break into the mainstream after delivering Wood's pages to Marvel and overhearing a panicked John Romita saying he needed an inker. Is that true?

BL: "Totally. One day, I was in the Marvel offices, handing in Woody's pages to the production dept. When I passed the art director's office, I heard John Romita on the phone, frantically trying to find someone to ink a desperately late issue of *Iron Man*. Like an idiot, I stuck my head in his doorway and said I could get the job done in the four or five days that was left on the schedule. It was an utter fabrication… but I *really* wanted to work for Marvel Comics!

"Johnny gave me the pages and said, 'Show me what you can do, kiddo!' Panicking, I ran down Madison Ave to Continuity Associates, where a lot of my fledgling contemporaries worked for Dick Giordano and Neal Adams. (The gang at that time comprised Terry Austin, Bob Wiacek, Joe Rubinstein, Bob McLeod, Joe Brozowski, Carl Potts and a host of others.) To my eternal relief, they all pitched in on the inking and we finished the entire book in less than four days. (On a side note: 20-odd years later, I finally met George Tuska and apologised profusely for ruining his lovely pencils on that job.) Once I turned the job in, I didn't hear from anyone at Marvel for weeks. At the time I was sure I had permanently destroyed any chance of ever getting work there again.

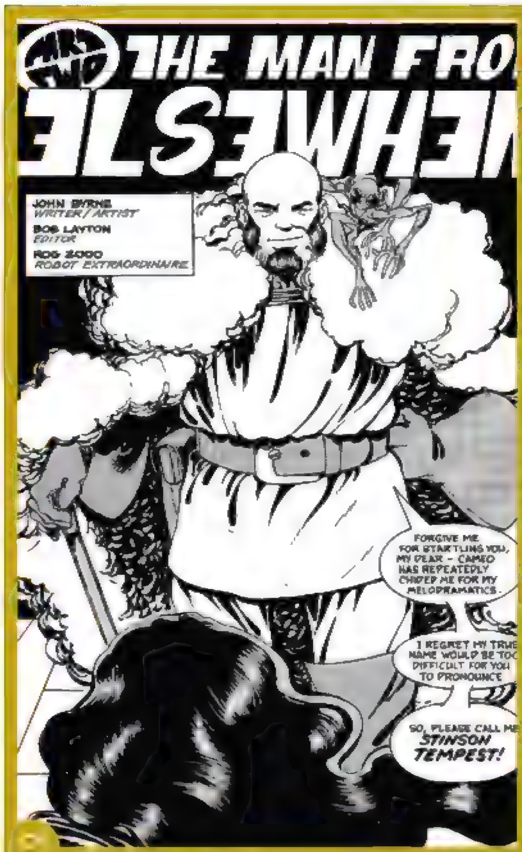
"Then, about a month later, a package arrives on my doorstep. I open it to find an entire issue of pencils on *The Champions*. I presumed that it was sent to me in error, so I called Marvel to find out where they wanted me to forward the material. But, to my utter amazement, Romita tells me that I'm the new regular inker on the book. Bless his Italian heart!"

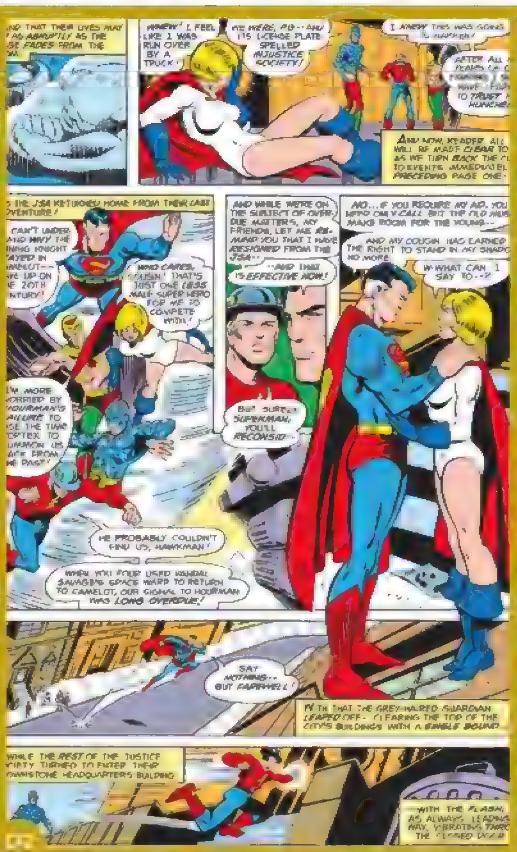
CH: What were the Marvel offices like at the time – as crazy as we've heard?

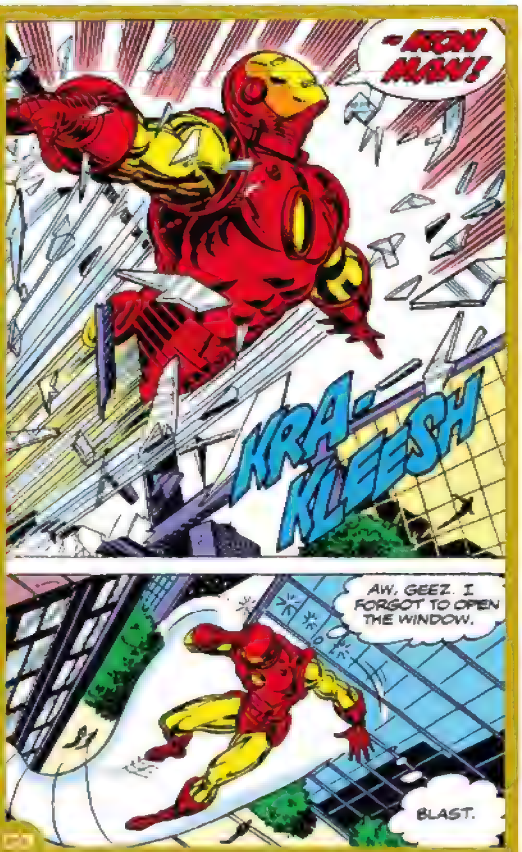
BL: "It was a creative mecca. Unlike DC's corporate atmosphere, Marvel was a madhouse – just like you imagined it would be – with graffiti on the walls and guys in rollerskates zooming down the halls. It was a renaissance period, when all the books were taking on a new and more adult personality. If you look at what David Michelinie and I were doing on *Iron Man*; what Frank Miller was doing with *Daredevil*; what Chris Claremont and John Byrne were doing with the *X-Men*; or Walt Simonson on *Thor*, you'll see that it was all part of redefining the Marvel Universe for a new generation of fans."

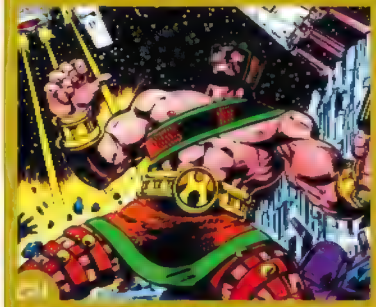
CH: So, in comparison, how was it working for DC?

BL: "The opposite of Marvel. DC was very structured and corporate. I always felt like they saw freelancers as intruders. You got in… and got out. You were escorted to an editor's office and expected to leave once you concluded your business. At Marvel, you hung out in the bullpen for hours, showing your latest work to fellow artists while music blared in the background. Also, DC seemed steeped in tradition and I always felt that their books were »


THE MAN FRO
ELSEWHE
JOHN BYRNE WRITER/ARTIST
BOB LAYTON EDITOR
ROG 2000 ROBOT EXTRAORDINAIRE
FORGIVE ME FOR STARTLING YOU, MY DEAR – CAMEO HAS REPEATEDLY CHIDED ME FOR MY MELODRAMATICS.
I REGRET MY TRUE NAME WOULD BE TOO DIFFICULT FOR YOU TO PRONOUNCE
SO, PLEASE CALL ME STINSON TEMPEST!
01


AND WHILE WE'RE ON THE SUBJECT OF OVERDUE MATTERS, MY FRIENDS, LET ME RE-MIND YOU THAT I HAVE RESIGNED FROM THE JSA--
--AND THAT IS EFFECTIVE NOW!
NO... IF YOU REQUIRE MY AID, YOU NEED ONLY CALL. BUT THE OLD MUST MAKE ROOM FOR THE YOUNG--
AND MY COUSIN HAS EARNED THE RIGHT TO STAND IN MY SHADOW NO MORE
W-WHAT CAN I SAY TO--?
WHO CARES, CUSIN'? THAT'S JUST ONE LESS MALE SUPER HERO FOR ME TO COMPETE WITH!
BUT SUPERMAN, YOU'LL RECONSIDER
HE PROBABLY COULDN'T FIND US, HAWKMAN!
SAY NOTHING-- BUT FAREWELL!
02


—IRON MAN!
KRA-KLEESH
AW, GEEZ. I FORGOT TO OPEN THE WINDOW.
BLAST.
03



DC
BATMAN
Hollywood Knight
08

Bob Layton | Major Works

01 CHARLTON BULLSEYE FANZINE | 1975-1976
After publishing a fanzine, *CPL*, with pal Roger Stern, the pair were contracted to produce Charlton Comics' in-house *FOOM*-like fanzine.

02 ALL-STAR COMICS | 1977
The longest run of Layton's early inking career was on DC's *All-Star Comics* revival, which told the modern-day adventures of the JSA.

03 IRON MAN | 1978
Layton's longest, most celebrated work comprises two extended runs in the '70s and '80s on the Golden Avenger's solo book.

04 HERCULES: PRINCE OF POWER | 1982
Layton wrote, pencilled and inked this highly entertaining early Marvel miniseries, which spawned a couple of sequels.

05 MARVEL SUPER HEROES SECRET WARS | 1984
Layton inked this hit, genre-defining miniseries, and was involved in the toy designs from which it grew.

06 X-FACTOR | 1986
Layton wrote the first five issues of this hit revival of the original X-Men cast, now depicted as "mutant hunters for hire" and posing as normal baseline humans.

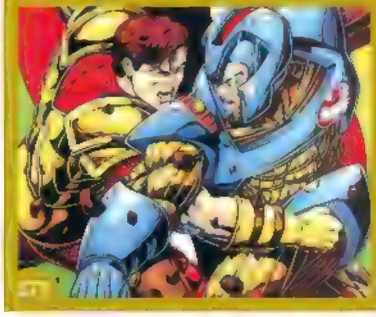
07 VALIANT COMICS | 1991-1994
Layton was one of the key creators of the Valiant range of comics, helping shape and create a number of the core characters.

08 BATMAN | 1998
For a few years around 2000, Layton returned to working for Marvel and DC; his DC stuff was mostly Batman Elseworlds projects.

09 CAPTAIN AMERICA | 2001
As well as a miniseries return to *Iron Man* with David Michelinie, Layton inked much of Dan Jurgen's run on *Captain American Vol 3*.

10 FUTURE COMICS | 2000-2004
With David Michelinie and one-time DC executive editor Dick Giordano, Layton created a new mainstream comic line for "the Average Joe".

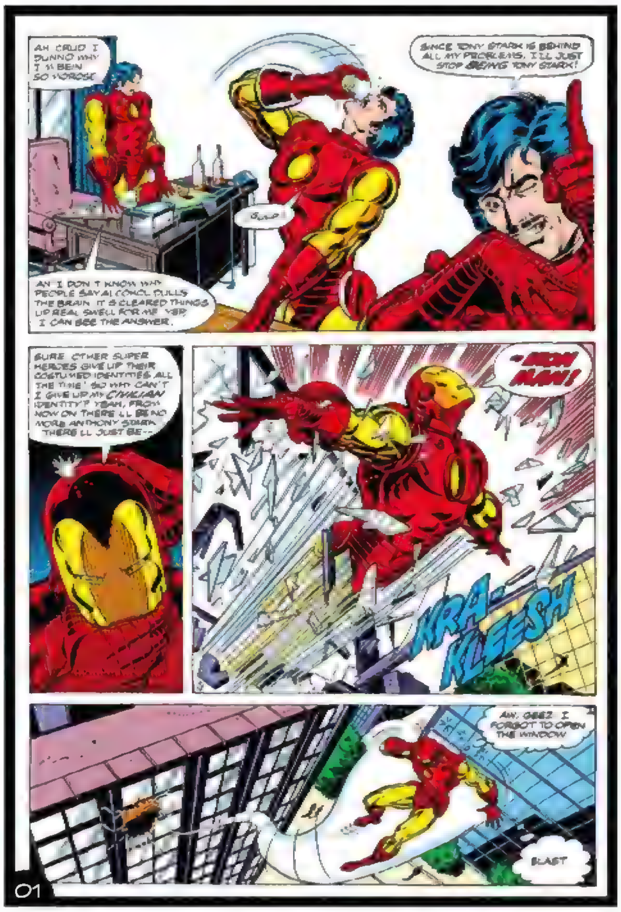
MARVEL COMICS
Captain America
09



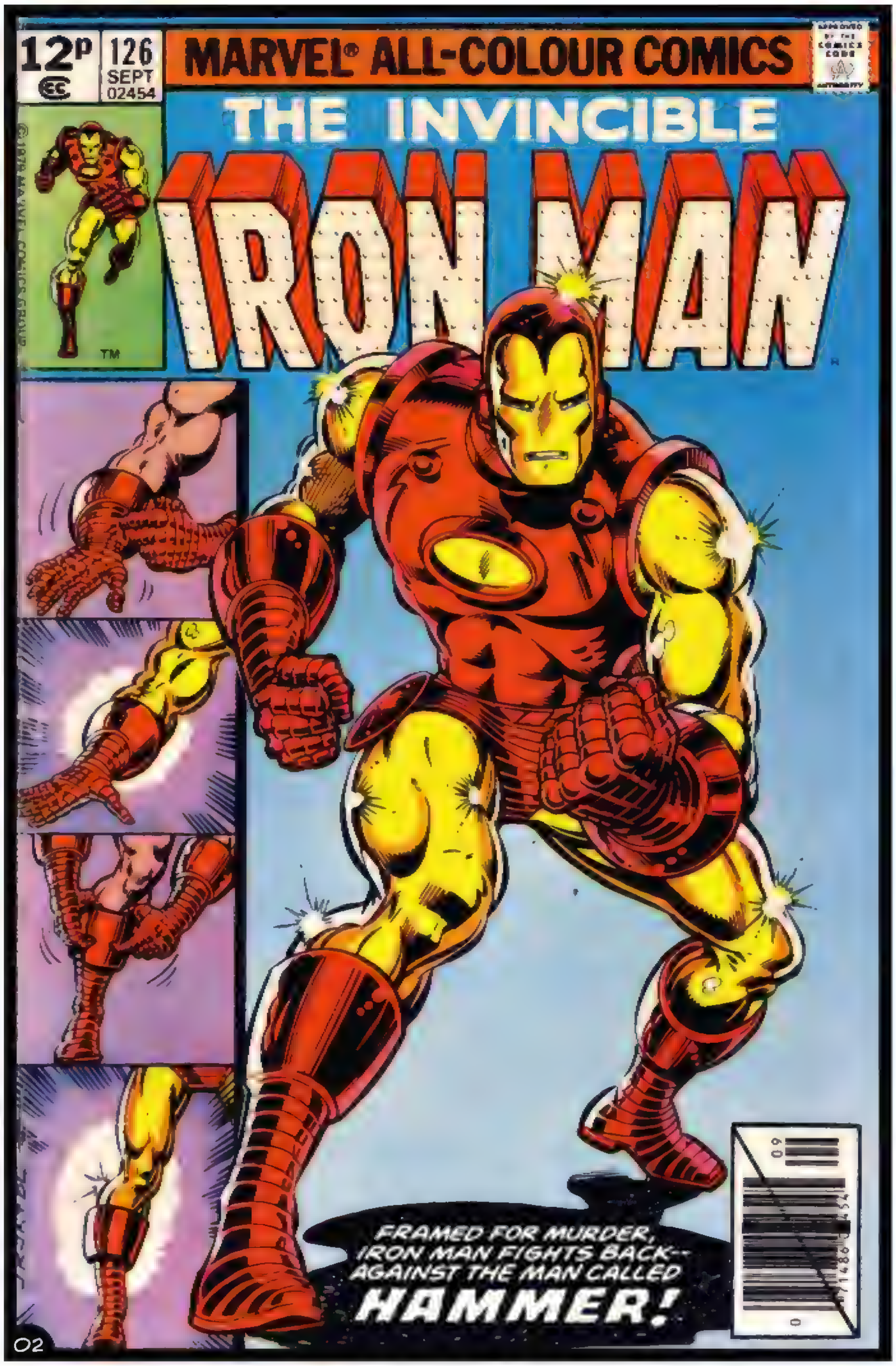
FREE COMIC BOOK DAY
METALLIX
10

01-3 ***Invincible Iron Man*, #120-128, 1979, "Demon In A Bottle"**

The classic alcoholism tale from the character-defining Michelinie/Layton/Romita Jr team. The armour malfunctions, supervillains attack, Jarvis gets shouted at and Justin Hammer lurks in the background. Recognised by critics as "the quintessential *Iron Man* story".


AH CRUD I DUNNO WHY I 'A BEIN SO MOROSE
SINCE TONY STARK IS BEHIND ALL MY PROBLEMS, I'LL JUST STOP BEING TONY STARK!
GULP
AN' I DON'T KNOW WHY PEOPLE SAY ALCOHOL DULLS THE BRAIN. IT'S CLEARED THINGS UP REAL SWELL FOR ME. YEP, I CAN SEE THE ANSWER.
SURE OTHER SUPER HEROES GIVE UP THEIR COSTUMED IDENTITIES ALL THE TIME! SO WHY CAN'T I GIVE UP MY CIVILIAN IDENTITY? YEAH, FROM NOW ON THERE'LL BE NO MORE ANTHONY STARK. THERE'LL JUST BE--
--IRON MAN!
KRA-KLEESH
AW, GEEZ. I FORGOT TO OPEN THE WINDOW
BLAST

01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MARVEL® ALL-COLOUR COMICS
APPROVED BY THE COMICS CODE AUTHORITY
THE INVINCIBLE
IRON MAN
TM
FRAMED FOR MURDER, IRON MAN FIGHTS BACK-- AGAINST THE MAN CALLED HAMMER!

02

more situation-driven, rather than character-driven. I never really fit in at DC, to be perfectly honest."

CH: You worked during the Jim Shooter era at Marvel, how would you describe the changes during his tenure?
BL: "It was a double-edged sword. Jim had a very abrasive management style that alienated a lot of the creative staff. At the same time, he was instrumental in a lot of positive changes to the company. But to be perfectly honest, Paul Levitz and Dick Giordano were way ahead of Marvel on the issues of creative rights. Although Jim takes credit for it, the truth is that Marvel merely countered what benefits DC initially offered in order to hold off mass defections by their top creative players. For example, I own a piece of the Huntress character that I co-created with Levitz back in 1977. I still receive royalties to this day."

CH: Your impressions of Jim Shooter?
BL: "Brilliant writer. He was a very persuasive individual. But, somewhere down the line, the work became about *him* and not the stories. Ultimately, it became a pattern of personal behaviour that eventually led to his downfall."

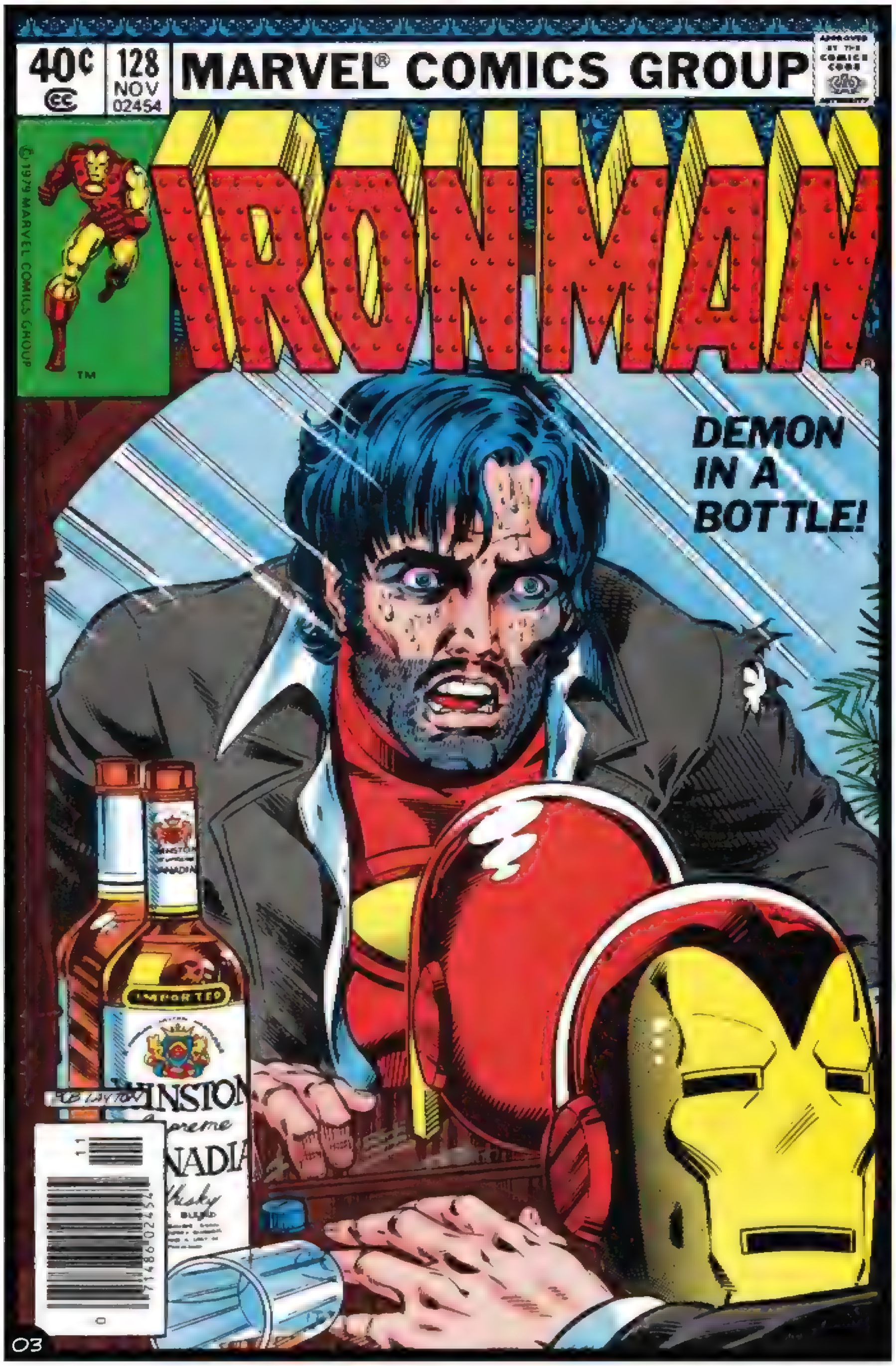
CH: Was *X-Factor* your concept?
BL: "Mostly. Although there were many hands involved in its evolution after I pitched the initial concept. When I brought back the original X-Men (with the newly resurrected Jean Grey), it became a lightning rod for inter-office politics. What happened? Jean Grey's resurrection opened up a vicious can of worms. I have to give the credit/blame to John Byrne (who was feuding with Claremont at that time). In the initial premise that Jackson Guice and I submitted, Jean Grey was not part of the group. It was the Dazzler. Mike Carlin, editor at the time, pulled me aside one day and said, 'Hey, how would you like to have *all* of the original X-Men back?' Apparently John Byrne had come up with a way to revive her and, of course, why would I refuse to use her? The rest was mostly inter-office squabbling. Eventually, I gave up and moved on. My first rule of thumb was, 'Have fun doing comics', and *X-Factor* ceased to be fun very quickly."

REDEFINING IRON MAN AND TURNING TONY STARK INTO A ROCK STAR

CH: You began your long and celebrated run on *Iron Man* with #116 in 1978. As well as drawing you also co-wrote many issues. How did you and Michelinie work together on the writing duties?
BL: "David and I collaborated on the plot for every issue, but David was the sole scripter of our dynamic duo. David and I had a 50/50 relationship on the plots, with both of us contributing equally to the story and character development. I have to say that David and I always complemented each other creatively and our association on *Iron Man* was one of the most fulfilling times in my career. We were creative partners for almost 40 years, which has to be some sort of Guinness World Record for comics.

"Anyway, just before my contract expired at DC, David Michelinie and I (we'd formed our partnership at DC, working together on *Star Hunters* and *Claw The Unconquered*) had agreed to leave the company for greener pastures. We both sensed the impending 'implosion' and didn't want to be a casualty of it. Together, we went to Marvel and interviewed to work as a team there. At that time, *Iron Man* was selling less than 90,000, which was termination

> *"We felt we needed to create a personal problem for Stark"*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MARVEL COMICS GROUP
© 1979 MARVEL COMICS GROUP
IRON MAN
DEMON IN A BOTTLE!
IMPORTED
WINSTON
CANADIAN

03

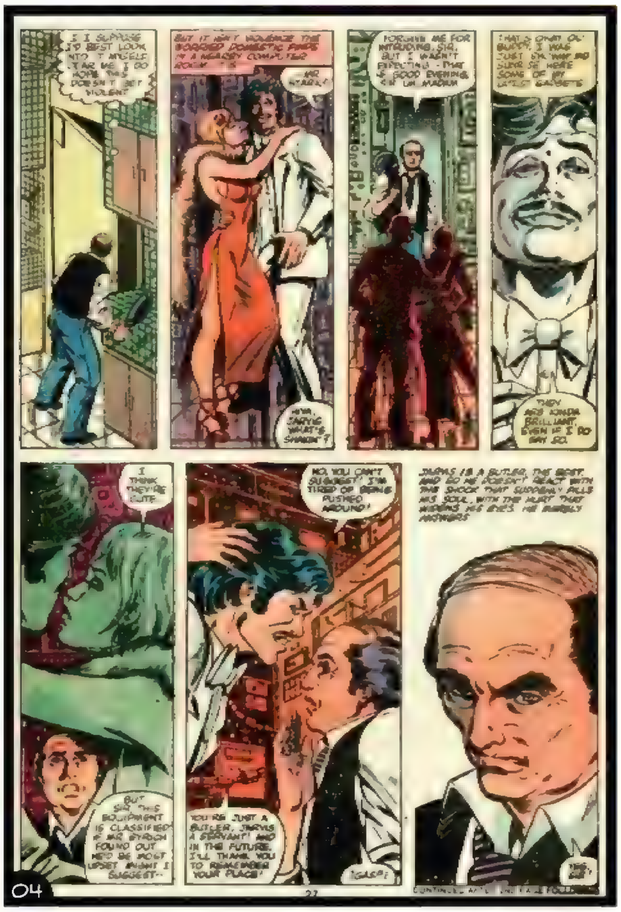
numbers in those days. I suppose Marvel figured that these two newcomers couldn't hurt anything, because they gave us a free reign to do whatever we wanted. Together, we retooled the series into the way I'd always imagined it could be. By the time we left, sales had grown to about half a million a month, so we must have done something right!"

CH: Was the "Demon In A Bottle" story arc your suggestion or Michelinie's?
BL: "Like I said, it was *always* a 50/50 collaboration. The story is considered a milestone event by most comic book historians and 'Demon In A Bottle' was recently voted one of the top 20 comic stories of all time. At the time we took over the series, David and I felt that we needed to create a personal problem for Tony Stark that fit the world of corporate business that we set him in. The heart attack gag had run its course and modern medicine had made the issue all but obsolete. I don't know anyone, outside of Dick Chaney, who has had 50 heart attacks and lived. Given Tony Stark's passions and somewhat compulsive behaviour at the time, the alcohol story seemed to be a natural."

CH: During this run, Iron Man looked far more metallic than previous versions and specialised armours became prevalent. You looked like you were having fun...
BL: "Obviously! The one innovation I'm mostly credited for is turning Iron Man into a metallic-looking hero. Prior to my being on the book, he was pretty much rendered like any other costume. I was so frustrated that Iron Man never really looked shiny and metallic when I was a kid. I even created my own *Iron Man* stories when I was young and dreamt up concepts for variant specialty armours. So, when I actually got to Marvel and fulfilled my dream of being able to work on *Iron Man*, I was able to inculcate those stories and designs that I dreamt up as a kid into the regular series.

"And, I've always had a head for science and continue to read scientific journals and such to this day. Dave left most of that stuff to me. Technology is constantly evolving and so should Iron Man. That was my thinking when creating the specialty armours. Each armour was designed for specific tasks and *that* was our thinking when approaching the Iron Man armour. It's unrealistic to presume that one device can adapt to all situations and environments. Making this fictional technology believable is the key to making the premise work."

04 ***Iron Man* #127, Oct 1979**
The famous Jarvis resignation issue, when a real letter was "accidentally" printed.


MR. STARK?
HIYA, JARVIS! WHAT'S SHAKIN'?
FORGIVE ME FOR INTRUDING, SIR, BUT I WASN'T EXPECTING -- THAT IS, GOOD EVENING, SIR, UH, MADAM
THEY ARE KINDA BRILLIANT, EVEN IF I DO SAY SO.
I THINK THEY'RE CUTE
BUT SIR, THIS EQUIPMENT IS CLASSIFIED! IF MR. BYRON FOUND OUT HE'D BE MOST UPSET! MIGHT I SUGGEST--
NO, YOU CAN'T SUGGEST! I'M TIRED OF BEING PUSHED AROUND!
YOU'RE JUST A BUTLER, JARVIS -- A SERVANT! AND IN THE FUTURE, I'LL THANK YOU TO REMEMBER YOUR PLACE!
GASP!

04

CH: Was the character War Machine your co-creation?
BL: "Absolutely. We created Jim Rhodes back in *Iron Man* #117. He evolved from a small supporting role into a large player in our storylines. Remember, there weren't a lot of strong African American characters in the Marvel Universe at that time and David and I wanted to give Tony a foil with a dissimilar background from his own. Rhodey was created by David and me to ground Tony Stark's fantastic exploits in some degree of reality. That slow evolution of the character into War Machine took decades to unfold."

CH: What do you think is the greatest element you introduced to Iron Man during your run?
BL: That would be the rock star Tony Stark persona, in my humble opinion. When we took over the series, Tony Stark was little more than a vehicle used to get the armour on him and go into action. David and I felt that it was more important to concentrate on the man inside the suit than the suit itself. That's why we introduced an entire cast of new supporting characters and changed the emphasis of the series to the world of corporate intrigue. If I had a choice to be Iron Man or Tony Stark, give me Tony any day!"

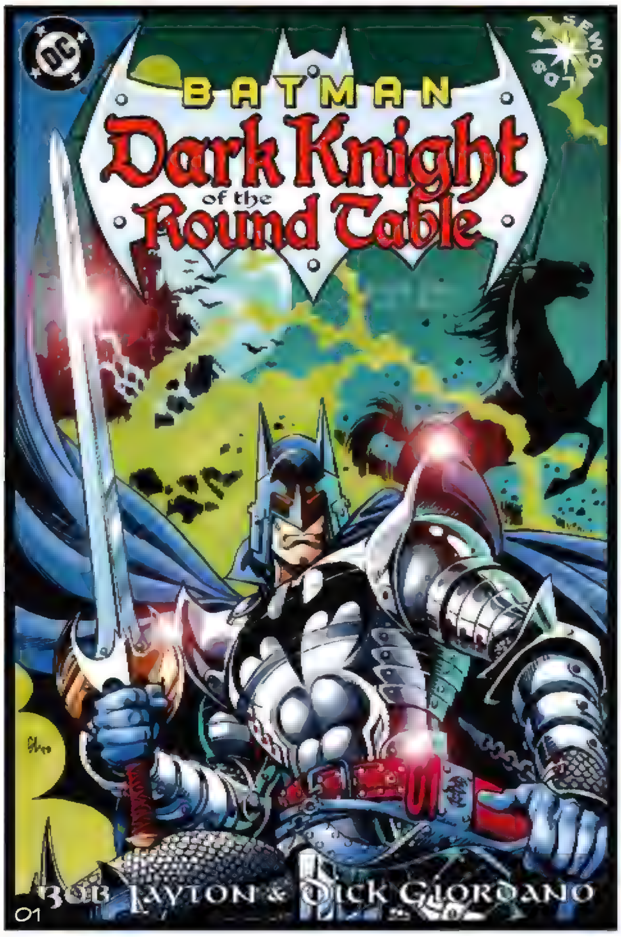
CH: So was your work on *Iron Man* the highlight of your comic book career?
BL: "One of them. *Iron Man* is right up there at the top. David and I were fortunate enough to have the opportunity to reshape the initial Stan Lee concept into something whose legacy

»

01 ***Batman: Dark Knight Of The Round Table* #1, 1998**
Batman rocked up as a mysterious knight at King Arthur's court.

02 ***Freemind* #1, Nov 2002**
Freemind – Future Comics' first title – was edited, inked and co-written by Layton.

03 ***Marvel Super Heroes Secret Wars* #7, Nov 1984**
Layton designed the tie-in toys for Marvel's Secret Wars.



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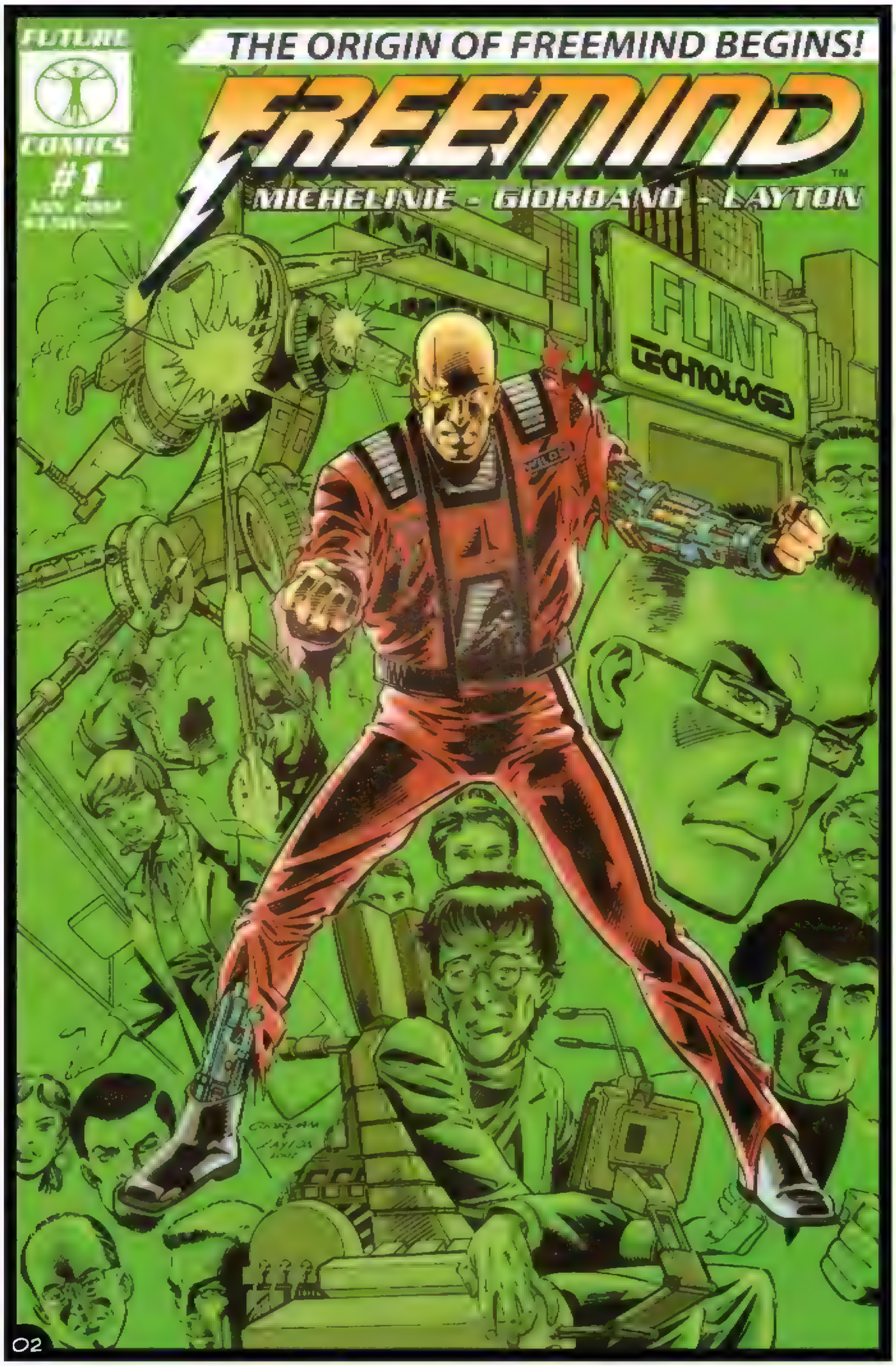

FUTURE COMICS
#1
THE ORIGIN OF FREEMIND BEGINS!
FREEMIND
MICHELINIE - GIORDANO - LAYTON
FLINT TECHNOLOGIES

02

endures to this day. I think it's the uniqueness of Tony Stark's character that David Michelinie and I created that links us to him and the fans. I feel very fortunate and privileged to have such a loyal and vocal fan base over the last four decades."

CH: Do you have a favourite *Iron Man* issue?
BL: "My absolute favourite is the 'Demon In A Bottle' saga. After that would be the Iron Man/Doom/Camelot ('Doomquest') saga. I was a huge fan of the Arthurian legends growing up and I'd conceived that storyline when I was a kid."

CH: Was it fun to return to the character for the recent *Iron Man* miniseries?
BL: "No. In fact, it simply became clear to me, after the *Iron Man Forever* miniseries, that it was time for me to move on from Marvel. I can't speak for David Michelinie, but the final product that is *Iron Man* #258 1-4 in no way represents *my* initial intent or the story concept originally created for *Iron Man Forever*. That mini debuted this May after 'sitting in the can' for almost two years. The editorial department held onto it until the release of *Iron Man 3* because they knew that they'd never get another Iron Man story out of me.*

"Unfortunately, that miniseries became a hodge-podge of corporate meddling, musical editors, nitpicking and story by committee. We even had to respond to story notes from the goddamned sales department! It became obvious that the editorial staff now toils for the Marvel/Disney brand name and their corporate masters instead of being driven to tell good stories. That is not for me. As Thomas Wolfe aptly stated: 'You can't go home again.'"

> *"We were cogs in a huge, creative dream machine"*

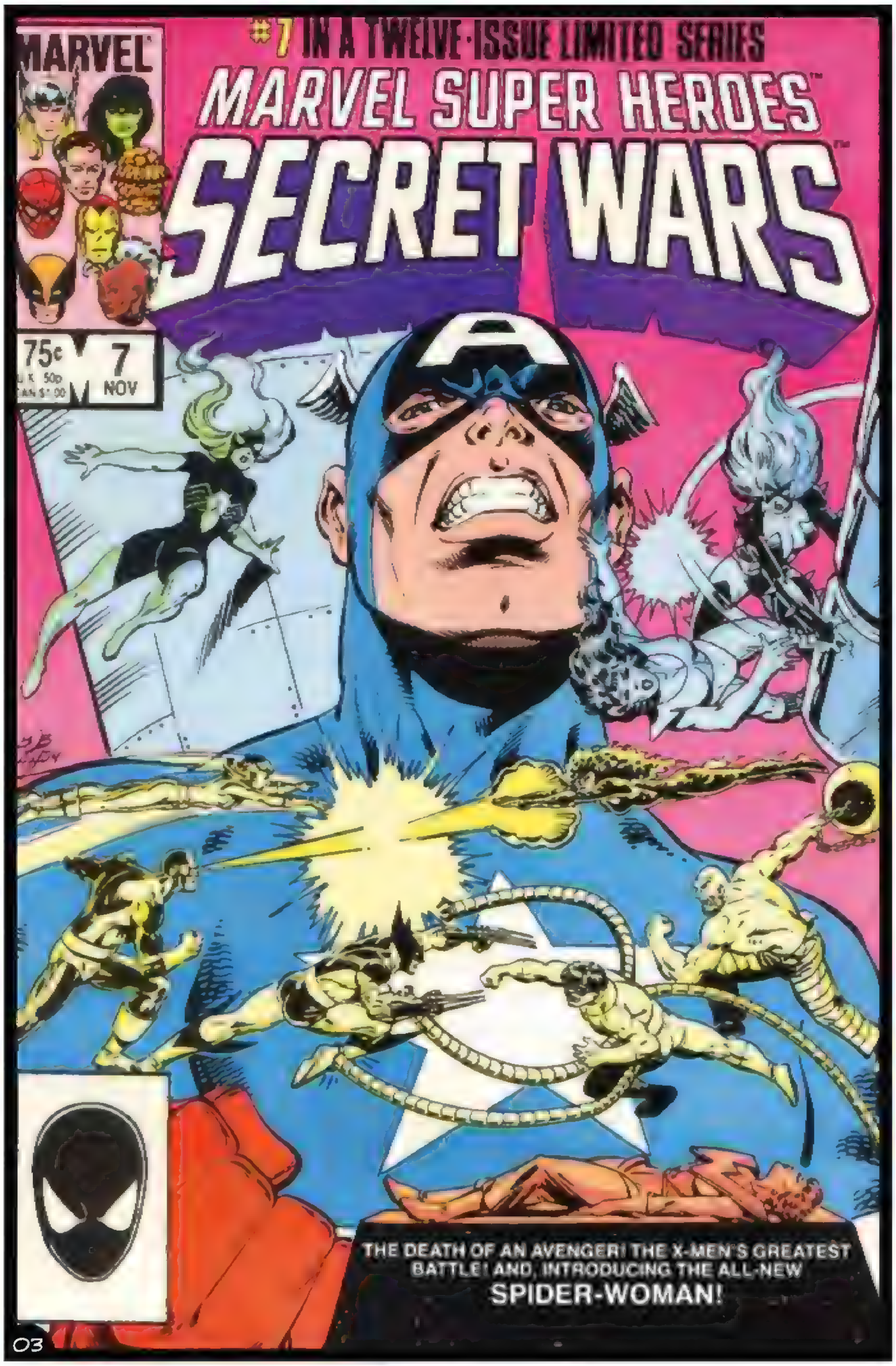
VALIANTLY, THE EMPIRES FALL

In 1989, Layton and former Marvel Comics editor-in-chief Jim Shooter set up Valiant Comics. Just five years later, however, in 1994, Valiant's venture-capital investor, Triumph, sold the firm to videogame developer Acclaim Entertainment for $65 million…

CH: What are your memories of how the whole Valiant project came together?
BL: "We started up in 1989, in a fifth floor loft in downtown Manhattan. The place was a total rat trap – literally. We had about 10 people to start with and we shared the space with entertainment attorney Lauren Davis, the daughter of record mogul Clive Davis. From the very beginning, we were operating behind the 8-ball. Jim Shooter surrounded himself with people who were very loyal to him, but not big on hard work or making deadlines."

CH: As Valiant grew, so did your responsibilities – do you remember this as a happy and creative time?
BL: "Valiant was a grand experiment with incredible highs… and unbelievable lows. In many ways, it was the Camelot of comic book companies… a wondrous time that this industry will probably never see again. Once Triumph ousted Jim Shooter, we became a very tight-knit family… with everyone sharing in the work and benefits. We all knew it wouldn't last… but it was great while it did."

CH: What were the real reasons for the eventual failure of the Valiant line?
BL: "I'm going to tell you exactly what happened to Valiant and why we had no control over


MARVEL
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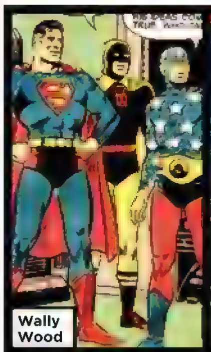
THE DEATH OF AN AVENGER! THE X-MEN'S GREATEST BATTLE! AND, INTRODUCING THE ALL-NEW
SPIDER-WOMAN!

03



Wally Wood

Dick Giordano

Barry Windsor Smith

Creating Layton

A great many artists and writers influenced Layton during his long comic-book career...

"In the beginning of my career, I was taught by the likes of Wally Wood and Dick Giordano. Dick would be my most prominent comics influence. (Dickie mentored me throughout my career – and that was a significant contribution to my general neurosis.) Since I was a kid, Giordano admonished me to learn every single aspect of the business, because that knowledge would ensure me continuing to get work when times are tough.

"I have to say that he was correct. For the majority of my career, I've been able to function as an editor, writer, penciller, or inker depending on what's available at the time. His recent passing was a great loss to me and the comics industry. Both Woody and Dickie hammered one, basic concept into my head. Time and again, they imparted to me that a good artist should be in service to the tale being told. I was very blessed to have been tutored by two such industry giants.

"And, without a doubt, I'd have to include two of my co-collaborators at Marvel and Valiant, Barry Windsor-Smith and John Romita Jr. Barry is one of the few, true geniuses of comic art that I've been privileged to be associated with during my career. I'd have to say that I was also heavily influenced by Gil Kane and Jack Kirby as well.

"As a writer, it would be David Michelinie, Jim Shooter and Archie Goodwin, as far as comics go. Outside of comics, it would be Arthur C Clarke, Stanley Kubrick and Rod Serling who are my biggest general influences."

its eventual demise. By the end of 1993, Triumph had made a small fortune off of Valiant. We were netting around $30 million a year and they had more than satisfied their investors. If you understand how venture capital works, they are always short-term investors. Once Triumph had made sufficient profits, they ordered CEO Steve Massarsky to sell the company. They wanted out. They were in the venture capital business – not the publishing biz. They didn't give us a choice.

"Steve and I met with a variety of potential new owners. Unfortunately, the highest bidder was Acclaim. Since Steve, Jon and I were all private stockholders of Valiant, we all got our money from the sale of the company. However, the way the deal was set up, the money was placed in escrow and paid out in 1/5th increments over the five-year term of our employment agreements.

"Remember my first rule of thumb – have fun doing comics? Well, I wasn't having a good time anymore. So, halfway through my third year, I sued Acclaim for obstruction of duties and wound up giving the lion's share of the money back in the settlement, in order to get out of the job and as far away from Acclaim as possible.

"Then, as you know from history, they mismanaged Valiant into ruin. The 'Imaging' of Valiant began with the new management revamping the characters to more resemble Image's look. Valiant fans rejected the new universe and quit buying the books."

CH: Do you think your Future Comics line in 2002 was ahead of its time by trying to bypass distribution?

BL: "One of the major reasons why Dick Giordano, David Michelinie and I started Future Comics back in 2002 was that nearly everyone we talked to in the Direct Market voiced that they were tired of being treated callously by the existing system. They seemed to be waiting for someone to have the balls to challenge the dominance of Diamond, DC and Marvel. Future Comics was the only comics company ever to attempt self-distribution in the US and we tried to change the system by bypassing Diamond and offering the direct market a better deal, as well as offering the publications to individual readers via the internet. It was the advent of the internet that made all that possible. That was something that wasn't practical during my Valiant days. Technology had certainly opened new doors to selling and distributing merchandise.

"Dick Giordano and I felt it would make sense to create a business where the retailers would actually have some input in our decisions. We would have a company that's friendly to them and tries to give store owners a break with a product that they can actually make a decent margin on. But unfortunately, everything we offered wasn't enough to get the retailers off their duffs and support a change. Plus, it turned out that over 50% of North American comic shops were not connected to the internet in 2003. That came as a real shock to me – I thought all comic shop owners were cyber-geeks!

"I still believe that the business model is sound and that, one day, someone will follow in our footsteps with the concept of self-distribution."

CH: So what are you up to at the moment?

BL: "I recently made a career change and moved to Hollywood to develop new properties for films and television, including *The Helix* and *Mettle* sci-fi screenplays for Edward James Olmos Productions. Also, television scripts for Nickelodeon's *Iron Man Armored Adventures* and Cinemax's *Femme Fatales*. I'm also co-creator/executive producer on the upcoming comedy/horror film, *Shambler,* for Odyssey Pictures. I'm currently writing the screenplay for the new action movie *Jacker* for comedian/actor Dane Cook." ■

You can commission Bob Layton to draw you a picture, from $200-$500 – visit www.boblayton.com for details.

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*You can find Layton's original treatment for that storyline in the archive section of this website: www.boblayton.com/Archive/August%2006/aug06editorial.htm

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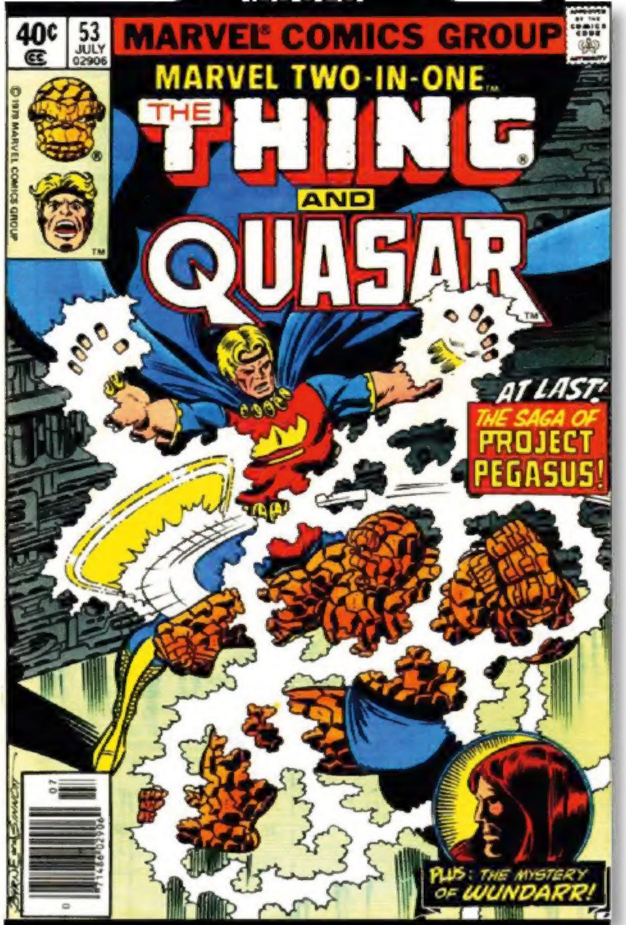
BIG ISSUES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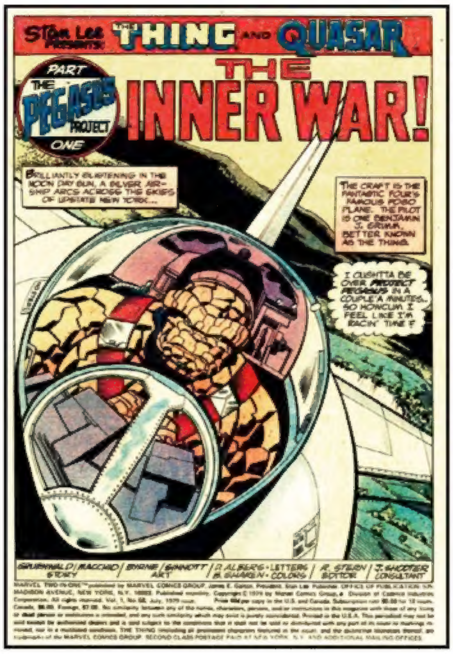
APPROVED BY THE COMICS CODE AUTHORITY
MARVEL TWO-IN-ONE
THE THING
AND
QUASAR
AT LAST! THE SAGA OF PROJECT PEGASUS!
PLUS: THE MYSTERY OF WUNDARR!

MARVEL TWO-IN-ONE #53 | **STORY** "The Inner War" | **BY** Mark Gruenwald, Ralph Macchio, John Byrne, George Pérez | **DATE** 1979

"Ultimate destruction to the Nth power!"

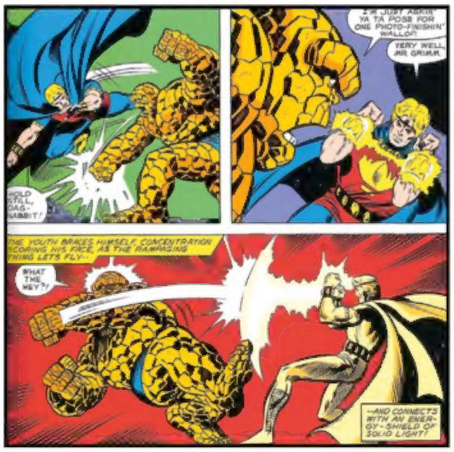
Marvel Two-In-One **rarely produced classics, but for six issues in 1979 it unexpectedly delivered a scorching story arc. By James Lovegrove**


STAN LEE PRESENTS: THE THING AND QUASAR
PART ONE THE PEGASUS PROJECT
THE INNER WAR!
BRILLIANTLY GLISTENING IN THE NOON DAY SUN, A SILVER AIRSHIP ARCS ACROSS THE SKIES OF UPSTATE NEW YORK...
THE CRAFT IS THE FANTASTIC FOUR'S FAMOUS POGO PLANE. THE PILOT IS ONE BENJAMIN J. GRIMM, BETTER KNOWN AS THE THING.
I OUGHTTA BE OVER PROJECT PEGASUS IN A COUPLE'A MINUTES... SO HOWCUM I FEEL LIKE I'M RACIN' TIME?
GRUENWALD / MACCHIO STORY | BYRNE / SINNOTT ART | D. ALBERS · LETTERS B. SHAREN · COLORS | R. STERN EDITOR | J. SHOOTER CONSULTANT

Team-up books, by their very nature, are inconsistent beasts. Creators come and go like the light from a flickering bulb. The quality of guest star varies: one month an A-lister, the next a barrel-bottom-scraper. There's seldom an ongoing, overarching meta-plot to sustain reader interest through successive issues. It's all about the quick-fix thrill of seeing the main recurring character interact with whoever happens to share the billing on the cover.

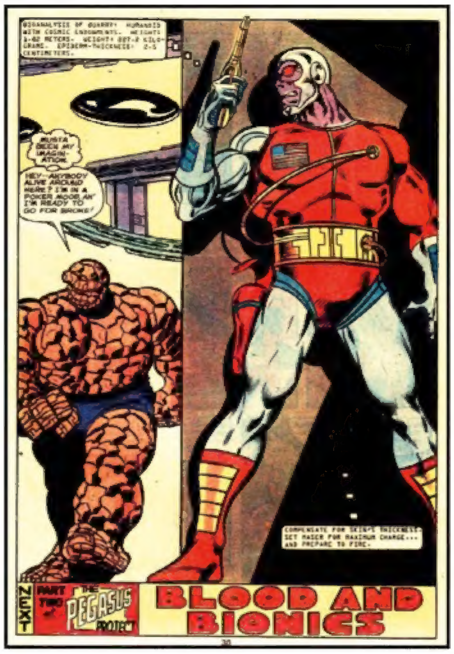
Every long-running team-up book has a purple patch, however, a period when it can do no wrong. For *The Brave And The Bold* it's the late-1960s issues scripted by Bob Haney and drawn by Neil Adams and Dick Giordano. For *DC Comics Presents*, it's Jim Starlin's "Mongul Trilogy" (#27-29) which pairs Superman with J'onn J'onzz, Supergirl and the Spectre (although there is something to be said for the title's early issues graced by José Luis García-López artwork). For *Marvel Team-Up* it's the peerless Claremont/Byrne run.

Marvel Two-In-One, starring the Fantastic Four's very own Thing, spun out of a couple of tryout issues in *Marvel Feature*, and was always a solid, dependable read with few real high points... until #53. Before then there were too many Bill Mantlo scripts seemingly tossed off in an afternoon and too many rushed art jobs from the normally reliable likes of Herb Trimpe and Sal Buscema. Steve Gerber injected some life into the title at the outset, but with his nine issues one always got the impression he would rather be writing something else. Otherwise *Marvel Two-In-One* was average stuff, content to coast on the irascible, wise-cracking charm of the FF's rockiest member.


I'M JUST ASKIN' YA TA POSE FOR ONE PHOTO-FINISHIN' WALLOP!
VERY WELL, MR GRIMM.
HOLD STILL, DAG-NABBIT!
THE YOUTH BRACES HIMSELF, CONCENTRATION SCORING HIS FACE, AS THE RAMPAGING THING LETS FLY--
WHAT THE HEY?!
--AND CONNECTS WITH AN ENERGY-SHIELD OF SOLID LIGHT!

It took the co-writing duo of Mark Gruenwald and Ralph Macchio to grab *MTIO* by the scruff of its neck and show what could be done with a team-up book. And that's exactly what they accomplished with the six issues starting with #53, collectively known as "The Project Pegasus Saga".

The guest star in #53 is Wendell Vaughn, better known as Quasar, possessor of a pair of stellar-powered Quantum Bands which project solid-light constructs. Formerly Marvel Boy, then Marvel Man, Quasar had been kicking around the fringes of the Marvel U for some time. Now he had got a proper job as security chief at Project Pegasus, an underground science lab dedicated to researching new forms of energy.

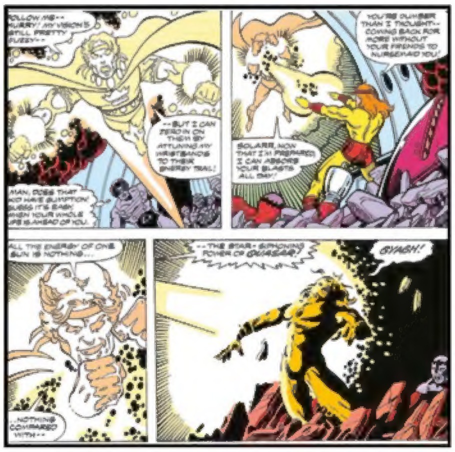

MUSTA BEEN MY IMAGIN-ATION.
HEY--ANYBODY ALIVE AROUND HERE? I'M IN A POKER MOOD AN' I'M READY TO GO FOR BROKE!
COMPENSATE FOR SKIN'S THICKNESS. SET MASER FOR MAXIMUM CHARGE... AND PREPARE TO FIRE.
NEXT PART TWO OF THE PEGASUS PROJECT
BLOOD AND BIONICS

As the story opens, the Thing's friend, the childlike Superman-analogue Wundarr, lies in a coma after suffering an overdose of cosmic energy from the Cosmic Cube. Even unconscious, he is still able to dampen any energy sources around him. A subplot is introduced involving sinister Dr Thomas Lightner, first seen back in *MTIO* #21 in the guise of baddie Blacksun, but now just a plain, ordinary lab-coated scientist again ... or is he? Another subplot sees man-baiting super-feminist Thundra joining the Grapplers, an all-woman team of superpowered wrestlers.

The final panel is a lovely reveal of the next issue's guest star: Deathlok. And on it goes from there, as biochemist Dr Bill Foster turns up, the former Black Goliath now rechristened with the somewhat less racist name Giant-Man; Thundra and the Grapplers break in to stash a piece of secret equipment; Wundarr awakens and becomes the hippy-fied, entropy-causing Aquarian; and Lightner is transformed into "sentient singularity" the Nth Man.

Gruenwald and Macchio keep all the balls in the air throughout – there's some expert plotting here – and they have the characterisation of Ben Grimm down pat. The art, meanwhile, is impeccable. After John Byrne jumps ship as penciller after issue #55, who could complain when his replacement is George Pérez?

With *MTIO* #53 and the start of "The Project Pegasus Saga", there was a genuine sense of the stars aligning and a team-up book fulfilling its potential. And that, ladies and gentlemen, is as rare a thing as a winged horse. CH


FOLLOW ME-- HURRY! MY VISION'S STILL PRETTY FUZZY--
--BUT I CAN ZERO IN ON THEM BY ATTUNING MY WRISTBANDS TO THEIR ENERGY TRAIL!
MAN, DOES THAT KID HAVE GUMPTION! GUESS IT'S EASY WHEN YOUR WHOLE LIFE IS AHEAD OF YOU.
YOU'RE DUMBER THAN I THOUGHT-- COMING BACK FOR MORE WITHOUT YOUR FRIENDS TO NURSEMAID YOU!
SOLARR, NOW THAT I'M PREPARED, I CAN ABSORB YOUR BLASTS ALL DAY!
ALL THE ENERGY OF ONE SUN IS NOTHING...
...NOTHING COMPARED WITH--
--THE STAR-SIPHONING POWER OF QUASAR!
GYAGH!

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